Pirandello’s Dramaturgy of Time

by

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Centre for Drama, Theatre, and Performance Studies
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Abstract

Luigi Pirandello’s drama, at its heart, deals with the problems of being and becoming, identity, and creativity. His works are centered upon the nature of personal experience and the ways in which we perceive and interact with the world and its inhabitants. But often overlooked is the role that time plays in those dramas’ already complicated and divisive subject matter. While concepts and themes related to time—e.g., memory and narrative—are often at the core of Pirandello’s drama, a cohesive approach to the topic of time and temporality in his work is lacking. This thesis, using three of Pirandello’s major plays as case studies, will offer an analysis of the playwright’s dramaturgical management of time as a textual theme, as the basis of dramatic narrative, and—in the guise of memory and anticipation—as the ontological foundation of the concept of dramatic character. These plays, written in the midst of the general discourse on time and temporality at work in the early part of the 20th-century, lend themselves to be read in dialogue with 1) the philosophical exploration of the concept of time, memory, and duration developed by Bergson, 2) the phenomenology of internal time consciousness advanced by Husserl, 3) Heidegger’s idea of temporality as the underlying structure of both being and meaning, and 4) Einstein’s consideration of the relativity of mankind’s perception of events in the space-time continuum. In this thesis, I will demonstrate that Pirandello was working at the
intersection of trends deriving from each of these philosophical premises, creating a theory of
dramatic form that is structured by the very concept it illustrates thematically, namely the
relativity of time in man’s experience of the world and the notion of temporality as the
foundation of all consciousness.
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this thesis is dedicated to my parents

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Preface

In the preface to *Sei personaggi in cerca d’autore*, Luigi Pirandello writes of the profound misfortune of finding himself in the company of “philosophical writers:” those writers who are compelled to relate a narrative because of the liveliness with which it is imbued, not because they find pleasure in telling the story ("Preface to *Six Characters*” 364-365). But, if compelled by the liveliness of a narrative, what does it mean for a character to live? In Pirandellian dramaturgy, the source of conflict is often the juxtaposition between *homo fictus* and *homo sapiens*, but what are the conditions at the foundation of the ontological and epistemological impasse at which these dramatic figures find themselves?

By way of a response, this thesis considers how the concepts of time and temporality deepen and complement the themes typical of Pirandellian drama: the failure of mutual understanding, the relationship between memory and identity, and the nature of the creative process, to name a few. To that end, I have selected three examples of Pirandello’s dramas: *Six Characters in Search of an Author* (*Sei personaggi in cerca d’autore*), *Henry IV* (*Enrico IV*), and *Tonight We Improvise* (*Questa sera si recita a soggetto*). Through an examination of these plays, I will analyze Pirandello’s dramaturgical management of time as a textual theme, as the basis of dramatic narrative, and – in the guise of memory and anticipation - as the ontological foundation of the concept of dramatic character. These three case studies—analyzed according to the frameworks introduced here—will demonstrate how Pirandello used his dramatic output to show how time underpins the failure of individuals to meaningfully engage with one another.

For the purposes of this project, the three plays form a corpus of works which share a number of features: 1) these are the plays of Pirandello’s maturity as a playwright, 2) they explore the relationship between theatre and life, and 3) they all focus on time as the
metaphysical ground of consciousness and as a fundamental principle of dramatic form. In *Six Characters*, the titular characters are denied life and conceived of as such—they complain that their reality is fixed and can’t change, and they carry their story with them, living every moment, aware of a shared past and future that renew themselves in a never-ending struggle. For Pirandello’s eponymous Henry IV, life is another matter entirely. He tells his visitors that his hair went grey while, in his madness, he believed himself to be a medieval German king. Coming out of his madness, he realizes that his youth, his identity, and his love have all been displaced. So, continuing the masquerade, “Henry” dyes his hair blonde in a distinctive pattern, rouges his cheeks, and coaxes the phantoms of popes and empresses out into the candlelight, and banishes them with the flick of an electric switch and bright and steady glow of an incandescent bulb. Having given his life over to the historical king for so long, it was easier to call for the same favor from the dead than to exact revenge on the living. In the final play under consideration, *Tonight We Improvise*, Pirandello explores the tension between real life and the world that is constructed for the stage—a world in which time and space are compressed for the sake of narrative. The planes of existence become confused and the nature of narrative is complicated as the characters are born into a world only to be manipulated by a director. It is a late work that emerges from Pirandello’s experience of overseeing his own company, the Teatro d’Arte (1924-1928), and from his exposure to German theatre practices.

In all three cases, there is a distinct fascination with the nature of time and temporality. Through these texts, Pirandello is working at the intersection of philosophical and scientific theories about the nature of time that emerged at the turn of the 20th century. This dissertation demonstrates that Pirandello’s interest in temporality is essential to his dramaturgy, despite its lack of attention in contemporary Pirandellian scholarship. It is not my intention to align Pirandello with any single philosopher, but to illustrate that his inquiry into the nature of reality
is, rather than a purely artistic endeavor, inextricably linked with the work of his contemporaries and the historical, scientific, and philosophical context in which he worked.

The choice to omit *Each in His Own Way* (the second of the trilogy of theatre plays) in favor of *Henry IV* might appear to the reader as an unusual, even glaring, omission. In truth, it would probably make a great deal of sense to discuss Pirandello’s dramaturgy of time within the so-called “theatre-in-theatre” trilogy. Two of the plays in this study, *Six Characters in Search of an Author* and *Tonight We Improvise*, are part of this sub-set of Pirandello’s drama, with *Each in His Own Way* at the midpoint (written 1923, premiered 1924). There is much that could be said in defense of the trilogy and a certain richness to Pirandello’s ever-evolving thought on the nature of dramatist’s creative process in these plays. The theatre-in-theatre plays are not simply dramatic works, but also aesthetic statements on par with “Spoken Action,” “Illustrators, Actors, and Translators,” and *On Humor*. In writing and producing these plays, Pirandello is trying to make theory work and be active, rather than simply offering an intellectual exercise on the nature of the creative process.

So, why dispense with the trilogy in favor of *Henry IV*? The short answer is that creativity is not a fleeting experience and the so-called, romanticized “burst of creativity” which a person might partake in is but one understanding of an aspect of existence that truly has larger ontological implication. The longer answer is this: creativity is not just an aspect of the artist’s work. People create all the time; they exist in a process of becoming that is understood as part of the social fabric which makes life and experience intelligible. As Chapter 3 will demonstrate, with *Henry IV*, Pirandello continues to problematize the creative process—which is itself an act that is extended over time—with characters that are perhaps more grounded in a conventional understanding of reality and humanness than the Six Characters. There are shades of this in his 1918 drama *It is so (If you think so)*, but *Henry IV*’s offers a significantly more sophisticated
treatment of the nature of memory, the construction of identity, and the protagonist’s attempt to fix his very self in a way not unlike that of the Characters. The story as “Henry” understands it might not be intelligible to the other people who visit the villa in which the play unfolds, but it does make sense to him.

There is a pronounced gap in Pirandellian scholarship with respect to time and temporality—unusual given that so many of his characters seem fascinated by time and its passage. Pirandello’s characters are given life for a purpose, and they each tease out what it means to exist, not in definitive ways, but rather in ways that demonstrate how life, its meaning and value are constantly in flux, how perception becomes reality, and how the world which seems so solid today can crumble into nothing tomorrow. Time is an essential component of Pirandello’s aesthetic, yet receives very little attention at present. The nature of and perception of time are located at the foundations of Western philosophy. But where does time intersect with dramaturgy and dramatic narrative? Mark Currie cites Paul Ricoeur’s distinction between “tales of time” and “tales about time,” to conclude that “time is a universal feature of narrative, but the topic of only a few” (2). Currie’s assessment of the interplay between time and narrative theory restricts itself to the novel. But if time is, as noted previously, a universal feature of narrative, then we must be able to analyze the temporal structure of drama as well. Overall, while there are fleeting references within the scholarship on Pirandello’s interest in time, there is nothing comprehensive that can be examined across the progression of Pirandello’s career and artistic development.

That is not to say there is nothing to get us started. Adriano Tilgher was perhaps the playwright’s first critic and interpreter. Among the ideas that Tilgher develops based on Bergson’s work is the Life/Form dichotomy that would characterize a generation of Pirandellian
scholarship. Tilgher identifies many themes which underpin Pirandello’s work, but one of the most significant is the dualism between life and form, which is bound up in the act of reflection that constitutes Pirandellian humor in part. In reflection, life tends to confine itself within fixed boundaries, resulting in a basic dualism between “the concepts and ideals of our spirit,” and the “conventions, mores, traditions, and laws of society” (Tilgher 21). Tilgher goes on to assert that, “On the one hand, blind, dumb life will keep darkly flowing in eternal restlessness through each moment’s renewals. On the other hand, a world of crystallized Forms, a system of constructions, will strive up and compress that ever-flowing turmoil” (21).

From this thematic dualism, Tilgher goes on to consider the “Detachment of Thought from Forms: humor and cerebralism,” suggesting that “Most men live within those frozen forms, without even so much as surmising that a dark, furious ocean may stir under them” (21).

Already, Tilgher has laid the foundations for the basic methods of reading Pirandello, in which the relationship between the individual, inner world and that of a larger context of language, conventions, laws, and expectation comes under scrutiny.

It’s not an altogether poor reading, and it is seized upon again repeatedly in the body of work around Pirandello, especially that which has been produced since the mid-20th century. Robert Brustein, in his 1965 book The Theatre of Revolt, characterizes Pirandello’s aesthetic as a conflict between time and timelessness (Brustein 282) suggesting an expansion of Tilgher’s Bergsonian endeavor. Pirandello’s humor and the dualism which features in that aesthetic principle is a reliable point of entry into his work, and without it, it is likely that Pirandello would not move beyond any assumption of impenetrable tedium. In fact, this characterization of

\footnote{In a version of the essay “Life versus Form” edited and translated by Glauco Cambon, Tilgher identifies 25 themes!}
Pirandello is emblematic of a larger shift towards not only modern theatre, but a modern consciousness (and any ensuing crises that would arise because of it). For example, Anthony Caputi notes that Pirandello was for a long time interested in, and perhaps suspicious of the artificial constructs that make daily life a possibility (Caputi 13). Caputi expounds upon this interest, writing

The affliction of the modern consciousness, as Pirandello understood it in the 1890s, was that it had lost the focus that inherited cultural structures had made possible for many centuries: it lacked the means to order, define, and regulate the data of experience; the familiar categories, the time-honored distinctions, the unexamined standards and loyalties that had given shape and meaning to experience had been lost (17).

Even as early as the 1890s, Pirandello’s concerns about the social structure that made life intelligible were evident and would continue to be a part of his work (arguably presenting his most extreme example in *Henry IV*). Still, even with Bergson’s own interest in time, Tilgher has very little to offer in terms of the temporal dimensions of Pirandello’s output.

But in addition to Tilgher’s Bergsonian interpretation (and the influence it holds), there is precedent for a Heideggerian reading of Pirandello, not solely through his comments on time and being, but also through Heidegger’s treatment of the particular ontological status of the work of art. Anthony Petruzzi’s reading of *Six Characters in Search of an Author* explores the play and its relationship to time and memory by way of Heidegger’s comments on the origin of the work of art. Petruzzi’s assessment of the Characters’ status as a work of art will come into focus in Chapter 2, which addresses *Six Characters* and Chapter 3, which will extend Petruzzi’s interpretation to *Henry IV*. Briefly, Petruzzi adopts Heidegger’s position as the work of art as monument, that is, “a preservation of the ‘primal conflict’ inherent in an event of truth. Because truth is an event, it is non-representational; an analysis of a work of art must unfold the process of conflict which is embodied and memorialized” (60). In short, a work of art stands
out against, but can never be separate from, the conditions of its origin, and as a result, such an event resists representation; the monument, as fixed or embodied, instead commemorates the truth as it is inscribed upon or set into the work of art at the moment of its creation (60-61).

Still, interpretations and analyses of Pirandello and his consideration of time are rare—the works just mentioned are the exceptions in the field, not the rule, and when time is mentioned, it is often in a subordinate position thematically, a consequence of Pirandello’s worldview and creative endeavors rather than a driving force. Generally speaking, Pirandello’s work, with its overt, self-aware allusions to and re-imaginings of ways to write drama and literature, is historically relegated to modernism, but as Wladimir Krysinski notes, there is much to be lost by confining Pirandello to theatrical modernity:

Postmodernism makes of Pirandello an obsessive point of reference, stored somewhere in a seldom-visited historical museum, to be brought out for fun, like a wax work dummy. While this point of view may be exaggerated, postmodernism in its playfulness can only play with Pirandello as a symbol or an outmoded structure. But this postmodern point of view gives us an opportunity to re-read Pirandello’s work in the light of a new theoretical, historical, and critical situation of modernity. It gives us the opportunity to reactivate and rethink his works by applying to them a new interpretative frame (Krysinski 215).

In addition to situating Pirandello within the world modernism, the connection to metatheatre as first defined by Lionel Abel, while understandable, is too conceptually narrow a treatment of these dramas. The distinction between Pirandello’s theatre plays and Abel’s characterization of metatheatre will be made clear in Chapter 2, but suffice to say, Pirandello’s theatre plays are about a great deal more than the theatre and the processes by which it is created.

By turning attention to Pirandello’s engagement with contemporary theories of time and temporality, it is possible to offer a deeper understanding of how perception, memory, and being are treated in his drama, and more deeply explore the relationship between art and life, or the mask and the performer. Furthermore, by reading Pirandello through the lens of time, we open
an analysis of his relativism in more concretely scientific terms, not simply as the impossibility of mutual understanding that is a central unifying theme in his work, but as a reflection of both a literary and scientific relativism that was rewriting how people understood and engaged with the world (which would be augmented again with the emergence of quantum theory).

Finally, this approach puts Pirandello in conversation with a larger question of how time is treated in drama and theatre. As Cole M. Critteden rightly asserts,

Drama is a genre whose elements are time and space. Through performance, drama is a spatial text involved in the actual process of real time unfolding, a process that cannot be paused or stopped by a reader who might otherwise set her book aside, and this unique aspect of the genre deserves attention. Of course any act of reading takes place in real time for the reader, and the interplay between fictional and real temporalities is a subject that has been extensively examined in twentieth-century literary criticism. The difference with drama, however, is that through performance the text itself (and not just the reader) is involved in at least two models of time: the real time in which the performance is staged; and the internal, fictional time represented in the play. Drama, then, might be better described in a discussion of the literary representation of time not only in terms of “poetics” or “prosaics,” but also “dramatics,” and this is particularly true of plays that actively turn their attention—both thematically and as an organizing principle—to the temporal element that is unique to drama (Crittenden 201)

While Crittenden’s comments are relatively recent, they are not new to Pirandello, who was long interested in the way language was translated to the stage and played out in space and time.

While the critical assessment of time in drama and performance remains a relatively open field, by reading Pirandello in conversation with contemporary theories of time and temporality, it is possible to understand how the questions around time, space, and drama have a longer history than is readily apparent.

Methodologically, Henri Bergson, Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, and Albert Einstein have all proposed theories addressing what time is (or might be?) and how we experience it (or perceive of our experience of it?). Drawing from their ideas, Pirandello, in his exploration of time, proposes a new theory of dramatic form which relies on the freedom of the
creation (the character) to move and act freely, rather than bend to the will of an author whose motives detract from that vitality. Thus, it is with the characters that this exploration of time begins. The atemporal and nonlinear experience of time that Pirandello suggests in *Six Characters in Search of an Author* and *Henry IV* finds its resolution in *Tonight We Improvise*, in which the imposition of form and narrative on an organic flow breaks down the creative process. There are seeds of this in the earlier works, but nonetheless, the striking confusion of life and form which manifests itself in the space between actor and character remains the central focus of Pirandellian scholarship.

1 Structure of the Thesis

1.1 Pirandello’s Aesthetic and Contemporary Theories of Time

The first chapter locates Pirandello in the tumult following Italian unification and the changing artistic climate that accompanied that turmoil in both Italy and the nationalistic sentiments that would arise across the European continent. In Italy, Pirandello was early on associated with the Grotesque Theatre, and would incorporate some of the features of Futurist drama into his work (though, one would be hard pressed to tie Pirandello explicitly to the futurists aesthetically, or even politically, given the relative lack of overt political messages in Pirandello’s work).

This chapter will also introduce—briefly—Pirandello’s connections outside of Italy with the Russian Formalists and the Prague School. It will acquaint the reader with Pirandello’s experience of the German theatre and the rise of the modern director, both of which figure prominently in the last play of this study, *Tonight We Improvise*. This chapter also details a selection of Pirandello’s early aesthetic statements. With these statements, Pirandello’s skepticism of the theatre’s efficacy is well established long before he turned to writing for the
theatre (he was writing about his misgivings towards the theatre as early as 1899). Some of these statements are reflected in his earliest major theatrical successes, notably *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, which while written in 1921 and substantially revised in 1925, nonetheless contain shades of his youthful reservations. This chapter also takes care in expounding upon Pirandello’s concept of humor (*l’umorismo*), which is the fullest expression of his poetics and necessary to undertaking any project related to Pirandello’s work. In addition to familiarizing the reader with Pirandellian humor, this first chapter (as well as subsequent ones) examines its structures and process, denoting Pirandellian humor as a distinctly temporal phenomenon.

Following a number of comments on Pirandello’s life and work, the first chapter concludes with a primer on the philosophical frameworks according to which Pirandello’s dramaturgy of time will be evaluated, identifying the works of Bergson, Husserl, Heidegger, and Einstein as the primary theoretical lenses through which Pirandello can be read, as well as a brief commentary on the nature and consequences of quantum theory, which becomes necessary to understanding Pirandello’s work from the late-1920s onward.

1.2 Chapter 2: *Six Characters in Search of an Author*: Putting Theory into Practice

The second chapter will contend with the first of a trilogy of theatre plays that Pirandello wrote. *Six Characters in Search of an Author* navigates the divide between incompatible planes of existence. In this work, six figures intrude upon a theatre company as they rehearse a play. Claiming to be characters rejected by their author, these six individuals—led by a Father figure and his Stepdaughter—ask the manager of the company to write and stage their story. The manager indulges the request, but the play is never written or performed due to the inability of actors and director to grasp the experiences of their fictional counterparts.
The grotesque confrontation between the actors and their fantastic counterparts speaks directly to the problems outlined in “Spoken Action,” in which Pirandello condemned the authors and playwrights who find the characters best suited to the action and the narrative they wish to construct. The Father and Stepdaughter differ fundamentally on the matter of whose story is being told—one, that of the Father’s desire to redeem himself, and the other, that of the Stepdaughter’s thirst for vengeance against him. Without a single point of reference through which the audience may interpret the story, the Characters speak directly to the literary relativity that indicates the limits of verismo and undermines its hold on the popular imagination. The characters find that in order to tell their story, it must be reduced and simplified so that stage might accommodate it. And so, the Characters begin to find their parts rewritten and their story reordered to suit the tastes of the public, to appeal to the egos of the actors, and to conform to the stock roles which they have each specialized in while working with the professional companies that Pirandello is mocking. In ordering and writing the narrative, what becomes apparent is that the depth of the Characters’ suffering cannot be conveyed. They reside outside of the conventional flow of time, and as such, are aware of all of the features of their narrative. Their story does not unfold over time as it does for a reader or audience member. Instead, as the Mother exclaims, “It’s happening now. It’s always happening. My struggle is not finished, sir” (Pirandello Six Characters 260). The Characters and their reality do not change – they can only be what they are. They defend their reality as “less real, but more true,” because unlike the world of the actors, it cannot contradict itself (Six Characters 217). The actors and manager, who are responsible for constructing and presenting an intelligible narrative cannot grasp the whole the Characters’ experience, and any attempt at reconciling these disparate realities

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2 “No, avviene ora, avviene sempre! Il mio strazio non è finito, signore” (Pirandello Sei personaggi 141).
inevitably fails. The characters with their unstructured, unhistoricized narrative, cannot be presented as they are.

As demonstrated in the 1908 statement, “Illustrators, Actors, and Translators,” art, according to Pirandello, fixes life and movement in a moment, but the process of art-making retains its freedom. Instead of the studied manipulation elements, the creative process and its product can only be approached upon their own aesthetic terms if they are to be properly analyzed, as best demonstrated in *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, as the fictional company fails to navigate the distance between the characters’ experience and the limits of theatrical convention. The play unrelentingly dismantles the process by which the artist’s inspiration is given form, with no clearly satisfying solution, and Pirandello’s revision of the text between the 1921 and 1925 versions continued to undermine conceptions of time in the naturalist narrative. Nonetheless, in both versions characters see the totality of their experience reduced to an easily contained linear narrative for the benefit of the company’s goals. Their life, in order to be presented on the stage, is traded for something fixed and easy. It will cause a sensation in the theatre, no doubt, but it will not truly be what the characters (and perhaps, by extension, their author) had hoped to express – and so the endeavor fails.

To read this play in conversations with Bergsonian principles inevitably raises questions about the nature of memory and perception. Perception activates memory and serves the individual in making choices and determining courses of action (Guerlac 119). But the relationship of character to memory is a complicated and troubling one: the characters know their story but do not have the narrative structures in place to give that story order. They experience their story but do not possess the capacity to affect change or make decisions. Instead of causality or memory, they understand and feel every moment of their narrative at once. For example, the Father, replying to the Manager’s inquiry into the whereabouts of the
script, insists that he and his companions are the drama and that it “resides within [them.]” (Pirandello *Six Characters* 216). They embody pure, qualitative sensation and the immediacy of their experience (the unwritten narrative to which they are attached) speaks to the pre-linguistic nature of sensation that Bergson advances. To Bergson, “memory [. . .] interweaves the past into the present [and] it gathers together multiple moments of duration and contracts them into a single intuition” (Guerlac 122). For these characters, there is no distance between perception and memory and the act of writing—or perhaps it is more accurate to say historicizing—is the linguistic horizon which compromises their vitality.

With respect to Husserlian themes, the structures of time-consciousness, if used to frame Pirandello’s considerations of characters, require an appropriate context for these individuals. Without a narrative structure, not only is the flow of time compromised, but the very nature of the story remains undefined, with the Father attempting to redeem himself and the Step-Daughter seeking revenge upon him. The protentions and retentions\(^3\) that the audience constructs in their encounter with the narrative must attach to one character as a point of access into the text—in the realist world that characters are emblematic of, the significance of the final piece is only determined once the author decides upon the underlying goals of his work. Without those decisions, the Characters exist outside of narrative context, unable to decide upon what their story actually is. Rejected by their creator, these Characters lack a narrative context, something that they hope the theatre company will be able to provide for them.

However, there is a fundamental difference between the actors’ experience of time and the Characters’ experience of time (or lack thereof) which precludes the possibility of sharing

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\(^3\) That is, the expectation/anticipation that something will happen (protention) and the immediate memory of what has just happened (retention), along with “the now” of the primal impression (Zahavi 83).
this story across these planes of existence. The characters do not possess the capacity to understand temporal extension because it is foreign to the nature of their fixed and unchanging reality of characters that exist outside of the flow of time and the structure of narrative. Moreover, they are forced to always experience all moments of their tragedy at once. Accessing this text through Heidegger’s framework proves a problematic endeavor, as demonstrated by Anthony Petruzzi’s 1997 article “Hermeneutic Retrieval and the Conflict of Styles in Pirandello’s Sei personaggi in cerca d’autore.” Like my own assessment, Petruzzi’s analysis begins not with narrative, but with character—justifiably, since the titular characters’ lack of a narrativizing, historicizing context is at the root of the play. It is apparent that the Characters do not originate from the reality of the company they encounter (that is, our own), and yet they are preoccupied with the question of being that is at the centre of Heidegger’s work. Thrust into a life-world which they did not choose (not the story they wish to tell, but rather the fact of their rejection by an author) the Characters negotiate their present conditions, projecting towards their life on the stage. However, this projection is inauthentic; whatever destiny they hope to achieve is ultimately unattainable because they “lack a historicizing context where they can make the finite choices necessary for authentic freedom” (Petruzzi 66). In attempting (and failing) to trade their timeless quality for a moment of existence on stage, the Character’s face a kind of mortality, in which their words—the very essence of who they are—no longer correspond to the truth which they see at work within themselves (75).

While their tragedy (at least the representative pieces which they try to share with the company) is a typical realist drama characteristic of the dualist paradigm as explored by Betty Jean Craige, it speaks towards a subjective understanding of reality. Heidegger’s work parallels the early 20th the relativist paradigm shift towards a monistic worldview as it decentres the universe, and with it, the reliability of words, narratives, objective morals and the experience of
time’s passage (Craige 45; Zahavi 81). The individual is constructed in the discourse and is constantly shaped by it, as demonstrated by the Father of Six Characters:

But don’t you see the whole trouble lies here. In words, words. Each one of us has within him a whole world of things, each man of us his own special world. And how can we ever come to an understanding if I put in the words I utter the sense and value of things as I see them; while you who listen to me must inevitably translate them according to the conception of things each one of you has within himself. We think we understand each other, but we never really do (Pirandello *Six Characters* 224).

Here, the characters contend with the limitations interpretation imposes. Not only do the actors and manager of the company they intrude upon fail to understand the nature of their existence, but the characters themselves struggle with the problematic story that they wish to share. From what is presented, it is a typical bourgeois drama, completed with marital infidelity, financial woes, sexual indiscretion, and violence. Within the realm of the commercial theatre and under the confines of naturalism, this story may be easy to tell as Craige’s so-called “author-mediator” directs our attention and sympathy, thus giving meaning and structure to the narrative as an omniscient commentator. But, Pirandello is not interested in this, since the world in which he is writing no longer finds meaning in external forces, but in the individual’s perception. Each of the characters has their own interpretation of the events, their own goals for the telling of their story—no single character can speak objectively about the nature of their drama. This relativist quality of personal experience manifests itself in a number of ways in Pirandellian theatre.

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4 “Ma se è tutto qui il male! Nelle parole! Abbiamo tutti dentro un mondo di cose; ciascuno un suo mondo di cose! E come possiamo intenderci, signore, se nelle parole ch'io dico metto il senso e il valore delle cose come sono dentro di me; mentre chi le ascolta, inevitabilmente le assume col senso e col valore che hanno per sé, del mondo com'egli l'ha dentro? Crediamo d'intenderci; non c'intendiamo mai!” (*Sei personaggi* 110).
1.3 Chapter 3: Temporality and the Life/Form Dichotomy in *Henry IV*

*Henry IV*, the focus of the third chapter, demonstrates a much more complicated vision of this interplay between temporality, being, and the creative process. While the set suggests a medieval throne room, the opening action dispels this assumption as a pair of costumed men guide the “new guy” through his role advising the resident of the estate—a mad recluse who believes himself to be the Holy Roman Emperor Henry IV. They are soon joined by a party from the nearby town intent on curing the man. Donning costumes themselves, the visitors put their plan into action, only to discover that the man had come to his senses years before and subsequently chose to feign madness in the intervening time. His secret revealed, he nonetheless tries to exact revenge on the man he believes responsible for the injury that precipitated his insanity, and subsequently retreats to his imaginary realm.

The protagonist’s non-linear narrative is facilitated by his (apparent) madness, and his memories are intertwined with the historical emperor’s story. Using the ruse of insanity, the character’s “play” (a term to which we may attribute both the idea of a performance and that of a joke, albeit macabre on both counts) confuses historical narrative and personal heartbreak. It is possible to point again to Bergson, who proposes that time holds and accumulates memory, and it is our experience which calls these memories forward. For Henry (the only name we have for the protagonist), coming out of his madness means confronting the loss of many years, experiences, and opportunities. The character himself becomes a point of convergence between both a personal and historical timeline, and in hybridizing them, Pirandello’s Henry speaks again to the relative flow of time that an individual experiences. In choosing to continue, he is master of his fate—so long as no one learns the truth. It is only when he tries to exert his will on those around him after having been found out that the fragility of the world in which he was master is made apparent. One person cannot be rooted in such disparate historical periods, and the
narrative that Henry constructed for himself out of both of them benefitted from the self-imposed exile. The violence Henry displays when he realizes that he still can’t attain the thing he wants requires that he accept the consequences of his actions as a modern-day murderer, or preserve himself—through madness—as the medieval emperor. Henry must choose his timeline and fix his identity within it, accepting its limitations and sequestration.

Pirandello suggests in *Six Characters in Search of an Author* that identity is fragmentary and shifting, and this claim finds its natural extension in *Henry IV*’s interrogation of the nature of madness. The play dismantles the notion of a comprehensible and fluid self and demonstrates the ways in which the experience of insanity may rewrite the individual’s experience of the flow of time. Turning immediately to Husserl’s work, if madness rewrites the flow of time for the sufferer, then the primal impression, retention and protention while presumably still as work, do not function in the same way as outlined by Husserl. Protention and retention in the context of madness cannot assist in the process of temporal extension which Husserl considers fundamental in his analysis of internal time consciousness. While mad, Henry is stuck in the “now” or at least a disjointed collection of “nows” and in being in the midst of this, cannot construct a coherent reality or life history.

However, it is not simply the experience of the individual in madness that is the object of concern with respect temporality. Heidegger’s work on *Dasein* offers a similar, if subtler, point of access into the hybridity that characterizes Henry’s life, and thus his experience of time. Looking at the basic structures of *Dasein*, the reader is presented with a character thrust into world not of his choosing not once, but twice—first into madness and then out of it. As a madman, he makes choices according to the *Dasein’s* future-orientation based on the historical account of the emperor’s reign. But, in his “sane-madness,” Henry makes choices that are dually influenced by world and personal history. Instead of partaking of a social and cultural code that
is mutually intelligible, he establishes his own. There is a doubled past (historic king/man betrayed by romantic rival) and hybrid present (historic political and religious conflict/modern revenge tragedy), neither of which can project towards a future that is intelligible or realistic. This hybridity makes Henry inauthentic—where individuals under more conventional circumstances identify each other as different depending on context, “Henry” has no point of reference to assist him in identifying himself and taking responsibility for the choices he makes. His future is one bent on revenge against those who hurt him, and in this, I argue that his choices are oriented towards a past, not a future.

Henry’s madness also points explicitly to the nature of relativity and the world appears different from the vantage point of the character’s false madness and the relatively normal lives of the visitors and employees who have sustained the façade. The most notable and heartbreaking example of this is when Henry remarks upon his age to the Baron, Tito Belcredi:

HENRY IV: Look at my hair! (Shows him the hair on the nape of his neck)
BELCREDI: But mine is grey too!
HENRY IV: Yes, with this difference: that mine went grey here, as Henry IV, do you understand? And I never knew it! I perceived it all of a sudden, one day, when I opened my eyes; and I was terrified because I understood at once that not only had my hair gone grey, but that I was all grey, inside; that everything had fallen to pieces, that everything was finished; [and] I was going to arrive, hungry as a wolf, at a banquet which had already by cleared away… (Pirandello Henry IV 203)5

Henry’s return to sanity offers him a view on a world which has shifted radically: he is older, and those whom he knew in youth are as well. They have enjoyed the privilege of living their lives, all while he was holed up in a villa, a prisoner of his own mind. Relativity maintains that,

5 ENRICO IV: E guardami qua i capelli! (Gli mostra i capelli sulla nuca.)
BELCREDI: Ma li ho grigi anch’io!
ENRICO IV: Sì, con questa differenza: che li ho fatti grigi qua, io, da Enrico IV, capisci? E non me n’ero mica accorto! Me n’accorsi in un giorno solo, tutta un tratto, riaprendo gli occhi, e fu uno spavento, perché capii subito che non solo i capelli, ma doveva esser diventato grigio tutto così, e tutto crollato, tutto finito; e che sarei arrivato con una fame da lupo a un banchetto già bell’e sprecchiato (Enrico IV 2494).
in its most basic regard, reality is different for each person and that it changes as the point from which it is observed shifts. For Henry, his point of observation is not a physical one, but an temporal one, as he is, quite against his will, transported across time periods and states of awareness, forced to see how the change and growth that others have experienced have been denied him.

1.4 Chapter 4: *Tonight We Improvise* and the Limits of Representation

The final play included in this study, *Tonight We Improvise*, is yet another example of Pirandello’s theatre-in-the-theatre experiments. The play, like *Six Characters*, features a theatre company pushed to its limits by the unusual demands of its director, Dr. Hinkfuss. Wanting his company to create an improvised performance, he establishes scenarios and settings in which the story might play out, but can’t help but to meddle in the proceedings. Only when the company believes Hinkfuss to be gone for good are the actors able to live their roles completely, but the success is short-lived as they realize how dangerous the endeavor can be.

*Tonight We Improvise* again confronts the actors with the complicated nature of the creative process. But in this work, the actors around whom the play is constructed, under the “direction” of Dr. Hinkfuss, find that the characters, in their capacity as living entities—the spoken action that Pirandello tries to preserve—begin to overtake and damage the actors creating them. The improvisatory scenario in which this creative process transpires again points to the difficulty of navigating incompatible planes of being.

Unlike *Six Characters*, *Tonight We Improvise* is much more optimistic about the potential of the theatre. Instead of the Pirandello’s early cynicism about contemporary dramatic dialogue in “Spoken Action,” his Dr. Hinkfuss argues that “in the theatre the work of the writer no longer
exists” (*Tonight We Improvise* 469) and that by resisting formal expectation and limitations, the work of art can be endowed with a new, timely life (*Tonight We Improvise* 471).

This statement is, of course, problematic with respect to this particular play. It is clear from the outset that the play is not improvised; a slap occurring between two actors must be rehearsed carefully, the individual playing the lead actress does not really face heart trouble, and the “members” of the audience who engage Hinkfuss with their complaints at the beginning are as much a part of the show as anyone on the stage (Schmitt 187-188). These contrivances make it difficult, though not impossible to analyze how Pirandello’s dramaturgy of time is at work in this play. Husserl’s construction of internal time consciousness allows the reader or spectator to see the characters as they are embodied by the actor and encountered anew in the act of embodiment. Even under the guise of improvisation, temporal extension is at work here, since the “actors” in Dr. Hinkfuss’s company are engaging with the fictional world of the characters, but unlike the old-fashioned realist characters of *Six Characters*, have the power to both affect the narrative and be affected by it. Not only are the actors and audiences responsible in constructing the narrative across time according to Husserl’s structure of time consciousness, but the characters, “alive” for the first time, partake of that construction as well.

But in its optimism about the theatre, this play, perhaps more than any other in this study, complicates the consideration of time and experience. At once open to the possibility of an analysis adhering to Husserl’s theories of internal time consciousness and temporal extension, it simultaneously undermines Heidegger’s structures of *Dasein*, as the characters themselves do not work towards a cumulative whole across time. Unlike the earlier Six Characters, here the fictional entities channeled by the actors are decidedly oriented towards the present, sacrificing a timeless and uncontextualized existence for a moment of instantiation on the stage.
Through the lens of relativity, the play also comments upon the cohabitation of space and time by the audience and actors of that of the play. Lobby interludes at the intermission blur the division between the performer/performance and the spectator/spectacle. Through these interludes, the audience members can align themselves with characters in a way that is not dictated by the narrative arc of a story. The realist dramas to which Pirandello was responding (at least in part) often structured themselves around and perpetuated a particular moral inclination. But, in these interludes, the audience can listen in on the characters’ conversations, unmediated, without the narrativizing context provided by the stage space or theatrical convention to guide their loyalties. In allowing characters to invade the space of the audience, the spectator is performing himself—both in the same space of his or her actual experience, and separated from it as part of a larger narrative. Thus, the play offers a double vantage point at from which the audience looks upon not only the drama and the conventions of theatrical creation, but also upon the role of the spectator in the process. Even though the play and the audience “interventions” are fully scripted, Pirandello calls for a renegotiation of the audience’s distance from and responsibilities to theatrical performance and in doing so, inextricably tangles real time with narrative time.

1.5 Chapter 5: Conclusion

This chapter will offer some remarks about the debt the theatre of the 20th-century owes to Pirandello’s innovations. I will show how this fascination with time is a prelude to some of the avant-garde and absurdist experiments of the second half of the 20th-century, using a case study of Samuel Beckett’s *Krapp’s Last Tape*. Beckett’s work offers a particularly fertile basis for comparison, and the parallels between *Six Characters in Search of an Author* and *Waiting for Godot* are well-established in contemporary scholarship. However, the parallels may be
fruitfully extended to *Krapp’s Last Tape* and the skeptical visions of human experience and the nature of reality that both playwrights embedded in their work. This final chapter shows the ways in which Pirandello’s dramaturgy of time and his dramaturgical legacy is revised and extended by Beckett, with an emphasis on production dramaturgy as it is suggested by the text.

As a means of extending the theoretical foundation of these introductory remarks, I will turn to Henri Bergson, to whom Pirandello is especially indebted (Caputi 18) and whose writings on time, memory and the body will help ground these investigations as we establish a philosophical tradition upon which the two playwrights at hand may have drawn.

Finally, this section will demonstrate how Pirandello’s preoccupation with time and temporality can be understood in his development as a playwright throughout the 1920s. It will take into account how Pirandello’s earlier literary works anticipate this theme in later dramas and how the dramaturgy of time has a considerable history over the course of Pirandello’s career.

2 A Note of Clarification: Selected Editions and Translations of the Texts

For the ease of the reader, I have selected *Naked Masks*, the collection of five Pirandello plays compiled by Eric Bentley and published in 1952, as the source of the English versions for *Six Characters in Search of an Author* (based on the 1921 edition) and *Henry IV*. For *Tonight We Improvise*, I have selected the translation by Marta Abba found in *Eleven Plays: An Introduction to Drama*, published by W.W. Norton and Company, Inc., in 1964. I have used Susan Bassnett and Jennifer Lorch’s versions of Pirandello’s shorter aesthetic statements found in *Luigi Pirandello in the Theatre: A Documentary Record*, published in 1993. The English version of *L’umorismo* was completed by Antonia Illiano and Daniel P. Testa, and published in 1974 by the University of North Carolina Press.
I will use a number of volumes as sources for the Italian editions of the dramas. All of the quotations drawn from Pirandello’s work will be given in English, while the Italian originals will be provided in footnotes. For *Sei personaggi in cerca d’autore*, I will use Einaudi edition edited by Davico Bonino and published in 1993. This publication includes both the 1921 and 1925 versions of the play, as well as a number of short stories and critical texts related to the play. For *Enrico IV* and *Questa sera si recita a soggetto*, I will use *I romanzi, le novelle, e il teatro*, a large volume containing Pirandello’s novels, short stories, and plays, compiled and edited by Sergio Campailla and published by Newton Compton in 2010. The source for the Italian versions of Pirandello’s shorter statements will be the collection *Saggi e Interventi*, published by Mondadori in 2006 as part of the *I meridiani* series. The Italian version of *L’umorismo* is the 1920 revised text, published in 1986 by Mondadori.

Additional versions of these works and translations completed by the author for this thesis will be duly identified in the footnotes.
Chapter 1
Pirandello’s Aesthetic and Contemporary Theories of Time

1 Pirandello in Context: Politics and Art in Transition

Early on, Pirandello situated himself as an unwilling heir to 19th century artistic practice. Some of Pirandello’s early short stories and a few of his initial theatrical works take their characterization of time from the naturalist tradition, presenting events as they develop in real time or at the very least, according to an ordered and linear sense of its progression. Even thought he had not yet fully developed the means by which he would break the conventions of *verismo*, Pirandello’s early theories rejected the means by which characters are developed as victims of circumstance subject to the whims of their authors.

1.1 Italy after Unification

Pirandello would write of his birth, “Io dunque son figlio del Caos” (*I romanzi, le novelle, e il teatro* 1). It’s a statement that, like much of Pirandello’s output, offers the potential for a plurality of readings, for while he was born near Agrigento in a suburb called Caos, the historical contingencies of his birth during the latter part of the period of Italian Unification known as *Il Risorgimento*, and social and political upheaval which followed certainly contributed the tumult that would leave its indelible mark on this son of chaos. Living half his life in the 19th-century, and half in the 20th-century, Pirandello is positioned especially well to speak to questions about the nature of reality and identity, since Italy was itself confronting these questions on the level of politics and nationhood. Pirandello’s Sicilian origins serve to both complement and confound the formation of the “Italian identity,” from the different concerns and realities—political, geographic, and economic—between the North and South. The resulting kingdom would be dominated by Northern Italian interests, with major financial and economic
centers situated in the North, while Southern Italy and Sicily had little say in the operations of the government.

Pirandello and his contemporary artists witnessed the shifting worldviews that marked the turn of the 20th-century as a particularly turbulent period. In moving towards a modern, industrial society in the wake of the political and economic upheaval of Unification, artists and writers demanded that Italy’s cultural institutions and practices reflect the dynamic and shifting identity of the new country. For example, in 1909, Fillipo Tommaso Marinetti published “The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism” in Paris’ Le Figaro, ushering in a movement which embraced the inherent violence of modernity and dispensed with logic, history, and tradition in favor of simultaneity, dynamism, and speed. The Futurists’ theatrical experiments rejected outright the practices of the commercial theatre, instead confronting their audience with incomplete and fragmented sketches of characters and moments incompatible with the naturalist aesthetic.

1.2 The Italian Artistic Tradition

In spite of all the identity politics at work in Pirandello’s essays and dramas, what is notably absent is any particular attention to actual politics. As a witness to the aftermath of Italian unification and the rise of Fascism, one might assume that Pirandello would approach this changing world in the manner of some of his contemporaries, like the Futurists. For instance, simultaneity—the compression and co-penetration of space and time—marks particularly important intersection between the Futurists and Pirandello. In Futurist theatre, verisimilitude is done away with and the illusion of a familiar reality (and the progression of events in ostensibly real-time) is cast aside. Disparate places and moments occupy the same space, though not necessarily in ways that directly affect the unfolding of events in each. The stage space is
marked as a site at which the frenetic pace of a newly industrialized society and the multiplicity
of human consciousness can be demonstrated. However, Pirandello was actually very distant
from many of the artistic movements that would rise up in Italy in conjunction with
industrialization and the rise of Fascism. Pirandello’s work dispenses with the overt political
content of these contemporary movements, even after declaring his allegiance to the Fascist party
(Bassnett and Lorch 10).

Still, even without overt political statements, questions of national identity would parallel
Pirandello’s development as an artist. He would invest a great deal of energy in evaluating the
efficacy of Italian theatrical traditions and critiquing those practices that he deemed deficient in
some way. There are mainly two theatrical traditions that Pirandello draws upon in the
development of his aesthetic. The first is that of the *commedia dell’arte*, and the second, much
more recent form is the Italian analog to naturalism, *verismo*, already mentioned in the preceding
pages. For Pirandello, the *commedia dell’arte* represented the purest form of theatre, one that
was closest to life itself (Bassnett and Lorch 9), offering the vivacity and dynamism that he
called for in the 1899 essay, “Spoken Action.” Even though Pirandello gave priority to the
author’s written text in “Spoken Action” he wrestled with the function and purpose of the actor
throughout his dramatic career, especially considering the emergence of *verismo*. Pirandello
cared little for the naturalist playwrights who, instead of finding the spoken action in which he
believed for enlivening the theatre, instead thought of a fact or idea to demonstrate, and wrote a
play to do just that—a criticism first raised in “Spoken Action” that would reappear in the
groundbreaking *Six Characters in Search of an Author* in 1921.
The verist stage in Italy, combined with the star system that would enable the organization of theatrical companies around star performers\(^6\) did not encourage the ensemble work characteristic of the *commedia dell’arte*; in the context of post-*Risorgimento*, the plays presenting Southern Italian characters, places, and circumstances were little more than reductionist exoticism in Pirandello’s eyes. Pirandello wrote particularly of the Sicilian culture’s resistance to export in the 1909 essay “Sicilian Theatre?” (“Teatro siciliano?”), paying special attention to the role of dialect literature, writing

> A dialect literature, in other words is made to remain with the boundaries of dialect. It if goes beyond them, it can only be enjoyed by those who have some knowledge of that particular dialect and of its particular uses and customs, and in a word of the particular life expressed by that dialect […]

> A dialect theatre that represented the varied, diverse life of Sicily could only be enjoyed and greeted with enthusiasm in Sicily. Outside Sicily the only success it could have would be through those manifestations that are well known, that have now become typical ("Sicilian Theatre?" 37).\(^7\)

This concern with the tension between regional and national identity and the role of dialects would not only be a feature of the young Pirandello’s work, but would persist into his maturity.

He returned to the topic again in 1921 essay “On Dialect” (*Dialettalità*), writing

> […] there occurred in Italy something that did not occur anywhere else: every region, or in some cases every city, was both small in itself and yet often at the same time a very large nation (and Rome was also the world). But this is not a defect but rather a richness — a richness of history, of life, of forms, customs and

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\(^6\) It is worth noting that while the *commedia dell’arte* and *verismo* are very different in style, content, and practice, the star system itself provides a kind of continuity between these two forms in the history of Italian theatre. Actors would specialize in certain kinds of roles, but the very best actors—the stars with which a modern theatre company could draw in crowds and the resulting box office revenue—would have to be able to play across genres and types, and it was the “probably the sheer volume of words that an actor was expected to know that led to the significant position held by the prompter” (Bassnett and Lorch 7)—a position which Pirandello exploits in *Six Characters*.

\(^7\) Una letteratura dialettale, insomma, è fatta per restare entro i confini del dialetto. Se ne esce, potrà esser gustata soltanto da coloro che di quel dato dialetto han conoscenza e conoscenza di quei particolari usi, di quei particolari costumi, in una parola, di quella particolare vita che il dialetto esprime […]

Un teatro dialettale, che rappresentasse la vita varia e diversa della Sicilia, potrebbe esser gustato e accolto con fervore solamente in Sicilia: fuori della Sicilia possono aver fortuna soltanto quelle espressioni di cui si ha conoscenza, divenute ormai tipiche; possono aver fortuna cioè il signor Grasso e la signora Agugli, che non avrebbero neanche bisogno di parlare per farsi applaudire: basterebbe la mimica ("Teatro siciliano?" 980-981)
characteristics. And it is sheer stupidity of art to want to renounce all of this by envying France for those smooth common characteristics of its generality ("On Dialect" 43).  

Even with this interest in the nature of Italian identity, Pirandello was shaped not only by the difference in perspective between mainland Italy and Sicily, but also by forces outside the boundaries of his homeland. While many theatrical traditions in Italy (particularly naturalism) were imported from France (as suggested above), Pirandello was able to expand his artistic horizon, due in no small part to the education opportunities afforded to him by his father’s successful sulfur mining business. He completed his doctoral thesis (on the dialect of Agrigento) in Bonn, and would return to Germany for an extended period of time after the Teatro d’Arte folded. It was this period of time in Germany, in the late 1920s, that would affect Pirandello profoundly, and it would be reflected in the final play in the study, Tonight We Improvise.

There is, however, one loose, generally ill-defined, and contradictory movement within Italy with which Pirandello becomes associated, however briefly—the Theatre of the Grotesque. Grotesque theatre offers little in the way of an intelligible poetics, and the plays that fall under its umbrella tend to have little in common (Calendoli 14). Silvio d’Amico offered up a coherent explanation of what comprises grotesque theatre as a “theatre in which the characters were, in reality, marionettes and puppets animated by means of a complicated system of strings [and…]”

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8 E questo perché da noi avvenne ciò che in nessun altro paese è avvenuto, che ogni regione, o anche solo una città, fu piccola e pure spesso grandissima nazione, e Roma anche il mondo: il che non è difetto, ma anzi ricchezza, ricchezza di storia, ricchezza di vita, ricchezza di forme e di costumi, ricchezza di caratteri; e stolido è per l’arte volervi rinunziare invidiando alla Francia quei piallati caratteri comuni della sua generalità ("Dialettalità" 1026-1027).

9 The failure of the mine after a flood is no small part of Pirandello’s career in Rome, and within Pirandellian scholarship, it is widely accepted that this natural disaster contributed not only to the precarity of Pirandello’s financial status in the early 20th cent., but also to the madness of his wife, Antonietta Portulano, whose dowry was invested in it. Madness, of course, would play a larger role in Pirandello’s work following this (rather protracted) episode.
not human beings capable of acting independently” (14), but would later retract the description because it would ultimately exclude many of the plays that would come to be associated with the term (14). Overall, the Italian grotesque theatre is defined not so much by a style or way of doings things, but rather a “number of playwrights writing in the period 1915-1930, whose works were very different from each other’s but whose common aspiration was to break with traditional theater and create a new theater” (Street and Umlas 5).

One of the defining works of the genre is Luigi Chiarelli’s *The Mask and the Face: A Grotesque in Three Acts* (*La maschere e il volto: grottesco in tre atti*, 1916), the subtitle from which grotesque theatre draws its name. During the course of the play, the characters explore the tension “between the self and society,” a tendency that would persist throughout Pirandello’s work, notably in 1918’s *It Is So (If you Think So)* and reappear throughout the twenties in works like *Henry IV*.

The Grotesque Theatre, with its strains of expressionism, its anticipation of surrealism, and its chronological proximity to the emergence of DADA and futurism speaks to the literary and artistic unrest around the period of the First World War. While these works offer critiques of positivism and the naturalist aesthetic influenced by its scientific inclination, there a political and social dimension to these dramas as well, through which they demonstrate the belief[s] that the apparent order of bourgeois society was a tissue of arbitrary conventions and false assumptions, [and...] the conviction that theater—as the arena of fictions, simulations, postures, and so on—essentially represented the privileged art form for their social and moral concerns (Vena et al. 12).

The grotesque theatre, in its reactionary tendencies, would become eclipsed by its contemporary Pirandello, whose major dramatic works would emerge from, but not forever remain, within the grotesque body of work. Still, it was the early success of these plays, particularly Chiarelli’s *The
*Mask and the Face* that made Pirandello’s success as a playwright and ultimately a *capocomico* possible (12).

Still, the grotesque is not an easy construct to ascertain; it has no definite style or method, only a demonstrable desire to break with tradition and create something new. In the treatments of its characters and plots, the grotesque theatre was acutely aware of the challenge it posed to the established theatre and the obstacles to its own successful staging and reception, as Giovanni Calendoli notes:

> All the characters of the new dramatic literature were painfully sincere and at the same time pretenders; they were both humans and puppets who analyzed, judged and pronounced punishment on themselves with a sort of cruel delight. It is easy to understand the problems of staging that one might have with theatrical works pervaded by these elements. They were definitely not well adapted to the Italian actors of the time, who were incapable of identifying with their feelings (14).

Pirandello famously made use of the actors’ reluctance to the new theatre, making it the centerpiece of *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, and one of the sources of the inner play’s failure to be realized. It would take several attempts (including Pitoëff’s 1923 production of the play in Paris) to show that the European stage, and the Italian Stage in particular was prepared for the monumental shift in aesthetics and practice that Pirandello presented them with over his career.

### 1.3 International Influences: German and Czech Theatre; Russian Formalism

Given the trajectory of his studies and career, it would be prudent to turn attention to Pirandello’s longstanding ties to Germany. The German theatre of the early-19th century advanced the idealization of reality supported by the philosophies of Kant and Hegel and the drama of Goethe and Schiller (Carlson 248). Like Italy, Germany underwent a tumultuous phase of unification, culminating with the establishment of the Second Reich in 1871 and the
declaration of Wilhelm I as Kaiser (Booth 332). With this shift away from political
fragmentation, the theatrical traditions typically dominated by court theatre would eventually
give way, and in the late 19th- and early 20th-centuries, Germany would see the rise of the
director’s theatre with artists such as Max Reinhardt and Edward Gordon Craig, the latter of
which, while coming from the English tradition, would spend a significant portion of his career
in outside of that country, working in Germany, Russia (with the Moscow Art theatre) and Italy.
Pirandello would respond to the rise of the director (and his absolute control over a production)
with his characteristic suspicions (though tempered) of emerging theatre trends in Tonight We
Improvise—a critique that will be discussed at length in Chapter 4.

But there were other literary and artistic movements outside of Germany and France upon
which the Italian experiment may have drawn inspiration. Russian Formalism, comprised of
new approaches to philology and literary history (as advanced by Roman Jakobson, Victor
Shklovsky, and others) sought to “bring to an end the methodological confusion which prevailed
in traditional literary studies, and to establish literary scholarship as a distinct and integrated field
of intellectual endeavor” in the 1910s (Erlich 627-628). The endeavor at hand, according to
Jakobson in particular, was not a consideration of the totality of literature, but rather
“literariness,“ which marks a particular work as literature (Erlich 628). In its pursuit of the
“function of poetic art,” Shklovsky’s theory of making strange spoke to a desire to restructure the

\[10\] The literariness of Russian Formalism found an analogue in Russian avant-garde theatre and in a particular
application of the concept of theatricality. For artists like Meyerhold or Tairov, “theatricality” refers to the “intrinsic
and self-referential quality” of the theatre (Jestrovic 43). In practical application, Russian theatre-makers deployed
“variety of defamiliarization devices including epic elements, the concept of theatre within theatre, stylization, and
baring the devices of theatrical representation” as a way to displace emphasis on the text and refocus the
presentation or reception to other elements in the production (43).
familiar “perception of reality” (in Erlich 629)\textsuperscript{11}, not unlike Pirandello’s dramatic exploration of the relationship between reality and perception that would follow in the 1920s.\textsuperscript{12}

Furthermore, the theatrical innovations of the Czech theatre following World War I (and the formation of a newly autonomous Czechoslovak republic) signaled a shift from the nationalistic sentiment of the 19\textsuperscript{th}-century theatre to “from ethnic to social issues, [and] from history to utopian and dystopian treatment of time” (Ambros 49). As for one unique treatment of time, Josef and Karel Čapek’s reimagining of the *commedia dell’arte* in *The Fateful Game of Love* (written 1910/11; produced 1930) is a play whose “action takes place in a permanent ‘now,’ a present tense to be actualized in every performance” (Pérez-Simón ”Concept of Metatheatre” 2).\textsuperscript{13} In addition to the unique treatment of time, this work of the Čapek brothers and their contemporaries explores many of the modernist tendencies that would appear in Pirandello’s work and those who would take after him, including the dichotomy of actor and character\textsuperscript{14}, the presence of mediating figures, and the “activation of the auditorium” (Pérez-Simón ”Theatrical Pendulum” 71-72). Like Pirandello’s *Tonight We Improvise* (and to a certain extent, *Six Characters*), Čapek’s play takes advantage for the familiar space of the theatre, and the

\textsuperscript{11} Erlich writes that “Shklovsky spoke about restructuring the ordinary perception of reality” (629). In this line, ordinary stands in for “familiar,” which I’ve elected to use as the counterpoint to “defamiliarization.”

\textsuperscript{12} In fact, the Italian theatre of the early 20\textsuperscript{th}-century was in significant contact with the contemporary art scenes of Russia and Eastern Europe. Filippo Marinetti visited Moscow and St. Petersburg in January and February of 1914, during which time he discovered a considerable distance between Italian and Russian Futurism (Carlson 341). Meanwhile, Pirandello’s connections to Prague are not insignificant. *Six Characters* was produced there as early as 1923 (Bentley 81) and his play *Non si sa come* (*You Don’t Know How*) premiered there under the title *Člověk ani neví jak* in 1934, almost a year before it opened in Rome (Bassnett and Lorch 190).

\textsuperscript{13} This is not unlike RUR: *Rossum’s Universal Robots*, which also takes place in an otherwise ill-defined “Future” (Čapek 274).

\textsuperscript{14} The hierarchical structures that privileged character/work of art over the actor are not new to Pirandello. Artists and theorists such as Maeterlinck, Symons, Craig, and Yeats would all critique the function and purpose of the actor, instead turning their attention to the potential of puppets and masks (Carlson 302-305).
undefined “now” in which The Fateful Game of Love transpires “[duplicates] of the space and time of a contemporary theatrical evening […] bridging] the gap between stage and auditorium, a reality effect that is reinforced by the difficulty of ascertaining the difference between the actors and the roles they are supposed to enact” (Pérez-Simón "Theatrical Pendulum" 73).

2 Pirandello in Search of His Theatre: Statements on Language, Drama, and Identity

2.1 Early Aesthetic Statements and Short Essays on Drama and Theatre

While his aesthetic is best summarized by his book-length essay On Humor (L’umorismo, 1908, revised 1920), Pirandello also interrogated the deficiencies of the Italian stage and theorized what might revitalize the form in short works that would precede his theatrical career. As he developed as a dramatist, he would return to the question of regional identity and dialect on stage, rooting him in the philological work that he carried out as a student in Bonn. While Pirandellian humor will be discussed (and will form a significant portion of the analysis this thesis undertakes), these shorter aesthetic statements will illustrate Pirandello’s unique vision for the theatre. The statements introduced in this section are as follows: “Spoken Action” (“L’azione parlata,” 1899), “Illustrators, Actors, and Translators” (“Illustratori, attori, e traduttori,” 1908), “Sicilian Theatre?” (“Teatro siciliano?,” 1909), “Theatre and Literature” (“Teatro e letteratura,” 1918), “On Dialect” (“Dialettalità,” 1921), and Pirandello’s introduction to Silvio d’Amico’s Storia del teatro italiano (1936).

Each of these documents exhibits (in varying degrees) Pirandello’s characteristic fascination with the nature of character, the instability of language, and the relativity of personal experience. In “Spoken Action”, Pirandello writes directly to and about the verist theatre,
suggesting that its problems come from the naturalist playwrights’ tendency to write dramatic dialogue that demonstrates a fact or situation, and can, by a process of reasoning, draw a conclusion about that situation ("Spoken Action" 21). Instead, Pirandello suggests an alternative to that method, and that by finding the characters and the languages that express and encapsulate them, the play can be populated by people, not puppets ("Spoken Action" 21-22).

These documents also serve to contextualize his later artistic output, responding critically to the deficiencies Pirandello considered endemic throughout Italy and raising questions that would be echoed in his dramatic text, particularly *Six Characters in Search of an Author*. Expounding upon the ideas first outlined in “Spoken Action,” the essay “Illustrators, Actors, and Translators” pinpoints the limitations of the actor, stating that his or her work can only translate what he or she perceives as the author’s vision of the character into action, which is itself restricted by time and space. The actor is charged with the task of reconstructing the experience of the character in himself or herself, and taking ownership of an entity of which he or she did not conceive. The process as such fundamentally changes the nature of the character. In a wider regard, the actor’s attempt to exert control over the life of the character mirrors the human condition, in which a person tries to create, control, and communicate to others a cohesive reality. At this stage of his career, Pirandello viewed the actor’s work as a poor translation of the author’s work—the actor’s work is necessary, but nonetheless diminishes the original.

But it is not only the actor who stifles the creative impulse. Pirandello also explored the role of the author/playwright in the creative process. In “Sicilian Theatre?” Pirandello’s own attempts at fostering a regional theatre were confronted by what Pirandello perceived as the impossibility of regional culture to be exported – outside of its original context, regional customs and cultures are reduced to stereotypes (Bassnett and Lorch 34). Pirandello continues his discussion of language and dialect in relation to theatre in the aforementioned essay “On Dialect”
("On Dialect" 42-44), considering the unique situation that Pirandello observed throughout the Italian peninsula the apparent duality of the nation, in which every region and city seemed both small and self-contained as well as a “very large nation” ("On Dialect" 43). He comments also on the reality that the author feels within him- or herself in the act of writing—one that is singular to the creator and whose language does not express an objective truth, but only what the creator feels within him- or herself ("On Dialect" 44).

“Theatre and Literature” marks a turn from the skepticism of Pirandello’s earliest statements and prefices Pirandello’s creation of his Teatro d’Arte ("Theatre and Literature" 47). It takes as its point of departure the lack of “literariness” that Pirandello sees as problematic in the popular theatre. Expounding on themes which emerged in earlier statements, good writing for dramatic characters is either elaborate or conversational ("Theatre and Literature" 48). Instead of imposing a style of speaking which the playwright deems appropriate to the story or style, “[characters] should speak according to their own personalities, to the conditions in which they find themselves, according to the action of the play” ("Theatre and Literature" 48).  

Pirandello argues that because this sort of writing will be inevitably and unalterably attached to a character and a scene, this particular use of language cannot be of the everyday—it possesses a literary quality by virtue of its context ("Theatre and Literature" 48). He goes on to say that art should not be centered on the imitation of life, “for the simple reason that there is no life which stands as a reality in itself and can be reproduced with distinctive feature of its own” ("Theatre and Literature" 49). The stylistic and technical touches that define the naturalist aesthetic stifle

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15 Bisogna far parlare i personaggi come, dato il loro carattere, date le loro qualità e condizioni, nei vari momenti dell’azione, debbono parlare ("Teatro e letteratura" 1069).

16 Non si tratta d’imitare o di riprodurre la vita; e questo, per la semplicissima ragione che non c’è una vita che stia come una realtà per sé, da riprodurre con caratteri suoi propri: la vita è flusso continuo e indistinto e non ha altra
art’s creative potential and restrict its ability to move freely in the world its constructs for itself ("Theatre and Literature" 48-49). Ultimately, even though the tone of the essay is more forgiving to the confines of the theatre, the performance is, as in previous comments, a “scenic translation” of the “literary work,” a translation in which some meaning is unavoidably lost. As long as dramatists write with the idea of this translation in mind (rather than that of the literary art) theatre will remain unsatisfactory ("Theatre and Literature" 50-51).

But, Pirandello’s most generous assessment of the theatre’s purpose and potential would be in his introduction to d’Amicos Storia del teatro italiano. Because of his time operating the Teatro d’Arte and his time in Germany after the company folded, Pirandello came to understand the unique mechanics of the theatre, and how writing drama and performing it, while two intimately related activities, each had their own processes, and ways of being. In what is perhaps the most significant passage, Pirandello declares that

Theatre is not archaeology. [. . . ] The text remains whole for those who would like to re-read it at home, for that is their culture; those who wish to be entertained go to the theatre, where it will be presented to the whole world – its withered parts and outmoded expressions renovated and adapted to today’s tastes. [. . . ] Because the work of art, in theatre, is no longer the work of one writer, who can always safeguard it in another way, but an act of life to be created, moment to moment, on the stage, concurrently with the public” (my translation).  

This passage represents a significant shift in Pirandello’s perspective on the theatre. No longer a poor translation of literature into action, theatre instead becomes a vibrant response to changing ideas, tastes, and social and political conditions, and can no longer be traced to the efforts of one writer (as the younger Pirandello would suggest in his comparison of the actor’s work to that of

forma all’infuori di quella che a volta a volta le diamo noi, infinitamente varia e continuamente mutevole ("Teatro e letteratura" 1070).

17 Il Teatro non è archeologia. [. . . ] Il testo resta integro per chi se lo vorrà rileggere in casa, per sua cultura; chi vorrà divertirsi, andrà a teatro, dove gli sarà ripresentato mondo di tutte le parti vizze, rinnovato nelle espressioni non pili correnti, riadattato ai gusti dell'oggi ("Introduzione" 25-26).
the illustrator or translator). Rather, the theatre requires collaboration, not only between writers, directors and actors, but between the theatre makers and the audience; all are necessary to the particular moment when the collective artistic vision is realized on stage, within the space of the theatre and across time.

2.2 Pirandellian Humor

Pirandello’s concept of humor is necessarily bound up in his dramaturgy of time, and as such, will contribute a great deal to the three case studies of which this thesis is comprised. The 1908 essay *L’umorismo* serves as the most complete summary of Pirandello’s aesthetic, offering both a historical survey of the evolution of humor (drawn largely from Italian literature) and outlining the key features of Pirandello’s grotesque characterization of the concept. Beginning with an evaluation of the comic and humoristic tradition in literature, and like the grotesqueries of the Domus Aurea from which *grottesco* is derived, Pirandello sets his own definition apart by juxtaposing the relatively detached and superficial comic with the introspective quality he identifies as essential to humor. Humor is built on the comic, and cannot exist without it, but it is the observer’s entry into a deeply reflective relationship with the observed in which humor is born. In short, Pirandellian humor emerges from the intersection of laughter and sympathy, famously illustrated in the 1920 revision by the following example:

I see an old lady whose hair is dyed and completely smeared with some kind of horrible ointment; she is all made up in a clumsy and awkward fashion and is all dolled-up like a young girl. I begin to laugh. I perceive that she is the opposite of what a respectable old lady should be. Now I could stop here at this initial and superficial comic reaction: the comic consists precisely of this perception of the opposite. But if, at this point, reflection interferes in me to suggest that perhaps this old lady finds no pleasure in dressing up like an exotic parrot, and that perhaps she is distressed by it and does it only because she pitifully deceives herself into believing that, by making herself up like that and by concealing her wrinkles and gray hair, she may be able to hold the love of her much younger husband – if reflection comes to suggest all this, then I can no longer laugh at her as I did at first, exactly because the inner working of reflection has made me go
This definition of humor, and the example with which Pirandello illustrates the concept, is essential to evaluating Pirandellian dramaturgy. Pirandello’s grotesque theatre relies on the making and breaking of dichotomies as characters confront actors and medieval kings play out their existences under electric lighting. This concept serves as the through-line of Pirandello’s entire artistic output, informing the failure of mutual understanding that recurs as a central theme in Pirandello’s work and the relativistic argument that characterizes the playwright’s consideration of the human experience. Additionally, and most significantly, the paired concepts of perception and reflection, which give rise to that “feeling of the opposite,” denote Pirandellian humor as a fundamentally temporal process.

3 Contemporary Theories of Time, Temporality, and Being; Methodological Frameworks

The next section will offer an overview of the main theoretical and methodological frameworks that the thesis will draw upon. They are Bergson’s concepts of duration and memory, Husserl’s phenomenology of internal time-consciousness, Heidegger’s concept of time and his thoughts on the origin of the work of art, Einstein’s theory of special relativity, and the Many-Worlds Interpretation of Quantum Mechanics.

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18 Vedo una vecchia signora, coi capelli ritinti, tutti unti non si sa di quale orribile manteca, e poi tutta goffamente imbellettata e parata d’abiti giovanili. Mi metto a ridere. Avverto che quella vecchia signora è il contrario di ciò che una vecchia rispettabile signora dovrebbe essere. Posso così, a prima giunta e superficialmente, arrestarmi a questa impressione comica. Il comico è appunto un avvertimento del contrario. Ma se ora interviene in me la riflessione, e mi suggerisce che quella vecchia signora non prova forse nessun piacere a pararsi così come un pappagallo, ma che forse ne soffre e lo fa soltanto perché pietosamente s’inganna che parata così, nascondendo così le rughe e la canizie, riesca a trattenere a sé l’amore del marito molto più giovane di lei, ecco che io non posso più riderne come prima, perché appunto la riflessione, lavorando in me, mi ha fatto andar oltre a quel primo avvertimento, o piuttosto, più addentro: da quel primo avvertimento del contrario mi ha fatto passare a questo sentimento del contrario. Ed è tutta qui la differenza tra il comico e l’umoristico (L’umorismo 135).
3.1 Bergson on Duration and Memory

Henri Bergson considered the relationship of matter to spirit through memory, defending free will and the progression of life against the notion of time as constructed of discrete and quantifiable elements. In one his earliest works, *Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience* (translated into English as *Time and Free Will*), Bergson inquired into the nature personal experience, calling into question the ways in which individuals are conditioned to describe sensations and the ways in which the human condition rails against the mechanistic models of reality which governed science and philosophy before the rise of Positivism. Bergson argues for a shift towards a pre-linguistic mode of experience, one that remains unmediated by determinist language (Guerlac 5). Pirandello’s early objections to *verismo* suggest, in part, that authors and playwrights attempt to bend characters to their will. The characters that Pirandello attempts to write counter this inclination and grapple with this problematic and multifaceted relationship to language. If Bergson’s analysis of duration is any guide to the scholar/artist at all, it is the possibility that duration stands as “a qualitative multiplicity, with no likeness to number” (Bergson *Time and Free Will* 226). The quantifiable units with which time is measured do not imply causality and succession and do not account for one’s own subjective sense of the passage of time. To express one’s inner sense of duration in discreet units is a translation, and a poor one at that.

3.2 Husserl on Intentionality and Internal Time Consciousness

Edmund Husserl’s reflection on the nature of internal time-consciousness, while not a direct parallel to the work of Henri Bergson’s work on time, perception, and memory, calls attention to the nature of identity construction as a temporal process—one that embeds man and his sense of self within the flow of time. Departing from the notion of “lived time” (or
“experience time”) Husserlian time-consciousness dispenses with the concept of objective time (Zahavi 81). It establishes the structure of experience thusly: a “primal impression” oriented toward that which is immediately present (“the now”) and accompanied by a “retention” of that which has just been and a “protention” which anticipates what is just about to happen (83). This kind of temporal extension is a synthetic process in which the observer does not observe different aspects of the same object or experience as incoherent fragment, but rather as fused across time (80-82). Husserl famously offers up hearing a melody as an example of this process; as each note sounds and passes away, the hearer retains the perception of past notes. In succession, the past, present and future tones construct the melody over time (81).19

The reading of a narrative or the watching of a play is similar to Husserl’s example (Currie 16). As the narrative unfolds, the reader both retains what he or she has encountered in reading, and anticipates the coming developments. But, unlike real life, the future in narrative fiction is established—the text may undermine the reader’s expectations, but it cannot be altered. The reader’s response to what they read is of key importance in the face of a set narrative, but the act of reading itself maintains the temporal structure of primal impression-retention-protention outlined above.

If, for Husserl, the nature of identity and personal experience is predicated upon the structure of consciousness he proposes, and if this structure is mirrored in our encounters with fictional narratives, the nature of character, particularly that of the Pirandellian character, proves to be a challenging (and troubling) feature of this analysis. Pirandello demands that a play must

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19 Husserl’s structure of time consciousness has a semiotic analogue in the work of the Prague School and theorist Jan Mukařovský. His concept of “semantic accumulation,” like Husserl’s structure, depends upon the reader or listener’s “retention and accumulation” of “previous semantic items as the message is received” (Hermans 246-247). Semantic accumulation represents a “bi-directional growth” of meaning generated by the reader or listener (Doležel 44).
be created by people who are “living, free and active” and for a character who is not attached to a plot simply to reinforce a goal or lesson which the playwright ascribes to his text (Pirandello "Spoken Action" 21).

But, just because Pirandello calls for these characters to be, as noted above, free, living, and active, it does not mean that the same structure of consciousness and a similar flow of time is a feature of the character’s awareness. In applying this structure of time-consciousness to narrative, this analysis is not concerned with the life of the character, but the experience of the reader or audience member. It is the way in which the narrative is encountered that gives this structure potency, and for all intents and purposes, Pirandello’s characters live outside of it.

3.3 Heidegger: Time as the Ontological Foundation of Being

Martin Heidegger redirected the phenomenological questions of consciousness and experience first raised by Franz Brentano and Husserl to the existentialist concern of “being.” However, this preoccupation with what it means to exist is not, and cannot be, an abstract question. Heidegger asserts that the philosophical traditions that precede his contributions are too far removed from the concrete experience of the everyday and as such, are flawed (Guignon Cambridge Companion to Heidegger 4). He rejects the notion of a “[…] pure, external vantage point in which we can retreat in order to get a disinterested, presupposition-less angle on things” (Cambridge Companion to Heidegger 6) and instead offers a world in which individuals constantly renegotiate their placement in time.

Heidegger’s engagement with Dasein is comprised of three structural elements inextricably tied with the historicizing and temporalizing nature of human existence (Cambridge Companion to Heidegger 8). Initially, Dasein is “thrown” into a world—a “concrete situation […] attuned to a cultural and historical context where things already count in determinate ways
in relation to a community’s practices” (Cambridge Companion to Heidegger 8). Secondly, Dasein is “discursive”—it interacts with the world along principles and mores aligned with this established mutual intelligibility (Cambridge Companion to Heidegger 8). Finally, through “understanding” Dasein adopts social codes, behaviors, roles, and relationships which give life content and in turn, “project” the individual into the future, orienting him or her towards the possibilities and potentials that are shaped by the present discourse and rooted in the contextualizing mechanisms of past experience (Cambridge Companion to Heidegger 8).

To Heidegger, human existence isn’t a thing or an object, but a “happening”—“a life story ‘unfolding between birth and death’” (Cambridge Companion to Heidegger 7, citing Being and Time). For Dasein and its structures to unfold authentically, awareness and acceptance of mortality is essential and the individual is responsible for “responsibility for what one’s life is adding up to as a whole” (Guignon “Martin Heidegger” 319). Dasein’s orientation towards the future accounts for the temporal extension of human experience. Rooted in the past and shaped by present conditions and choices, individuals are embedded in a continual process of becoming.

3.4 Einstein’s Relativity

At the turn of the century, science and mathematics began to interrogate the nature of time, most notably with Einstein’s special and general theories of relativity, which assert that the manner in which reality and time are perceived is contingent upon the relationship of the observer to the observed, undermining even the most basic notions of what it means to be real. Pirandello’s relativism complicates the notion of reality and truth, notably in the 1917 play It is so (if you think so) (Cosi è (se vi pare)), in which the object of the town’s gossip ultimately claims to be no one, allowing both her husband and her (apparent) mother to project onto her contradictory roles they wish her to occupy—roles that she manages to reconcile within herself.
Betty Jean Craige traces the genealogy of relativity through the early twentieth century *avant-garde*, noting that this paradigm shift counters the “author-mediator” characteristic of a dualist perspective of the naturalist stage (Craige 31-32). With the emergence of the concept of relativity, the notion of objective, concretely definable time undergoes a fundamental transformation, resulting in a decentred universe in which meaning is not found via an external force, but rather in relation to the world and through discourse (16-18). As a result, things such as “reality” and “truth” are destabilized and the perception of the individual emerges at the centre of the bourgeoning subjectivism (46-48).

3.5 The Aesthetic Consequences of Quantum Theory: Multiple Worlds

This last theoretical and methodological framework will largely contribute to my treatment of the last play under consideration, *Tonight We Improvise*. The late 1920s witnessed the emergence of a new way of dealing with the physical world on the atomic and subatomic levels. In broad strokes, quantum theory accounts for and predicts the behaviors and movements of the impossibly small particles that are the foundations of the physical world. Among some of the most significant concepts at the heart of quantum theory are a collection of uncertainty principles, which were advanced most notably by Werner Heisenberg and build upon the wave-particle duality of subatomic particles (Lightman 191). In effect, protons and electrons exhibit the properties of both waves (which are spread out over space) and particles (which are localized to a single point) simultaneously (Lightman 192), as demonstrated by the famous Double-Slit experiment.

But, in spite of the complex mathematical apparatus that reveals the nature of the quantum world, this duality can be only described in terms of probability; the pattern of distribution of photons and electrons can only be determined after many sub-atomic particles
have passed through the slits and it is impossible to know where a photon will strike (Lightman 193). Heisenberg’s interpretation of these behaviors posits that we can only know the position or the velocity of a subatomic particle, but not both; by observing and measuring these particles, we disturbed them, and determining either the position or velocity of these particles precludes the accurate determination of the other (Lightman 194; 199).

The bewildering duality of protons and electrons opens one of the most exciting and confounding ideas of modern physics: the Many World Theory. Broadly speaking, the Many Worlds interpretation of quantum mechanics proposes that many worlds exist in parallel with our own, occupying that same space and time as our own world (Vaidman n. page). Accounting for infinite possibilities, the many worlds interpretation removes randomness from all of physics (Vaidman n. page). The uncertainty principle and the many worlds theory (though the latter really emerges later in the 20th-century) offer abundant possibilities for the interpretation of Pirandello’s later works, augment the relativism advanced by Einstein that would, by way of Pirandello imagination, serve as a hallmark of his literary and dramatic output. This is not to say that art is always in service of science, but rather demonstrates that Pirandello’s dramaturgy of time was actively engaged with concepts of being and inquiries into the nature of reality on many fronts—artistic and scientific—and continues to be invigorated by advances in our understanding of the nature of reality.

4 From Words to Action: Towards *Six Characters*

From here, the thesis will proceed to its first case study with *Six Characters in Search of an Author*. *Six Characters* is notable in its reflection of Pirandello’s early statements on theatre and dramatic dialogue, and is the first of his major dramas to explore the practical realities of the ideas he began to propose in 1899. As a result, *Six Characters* is uniquely positioned to reveal the basic questions emerging around of Pirandello’s dramaturgy of time, as his ideas about and
objections to the theatre are transformed from words into action. It is only fitting to begin with an analysis of *Six Characters*—the play that stands as both the key to Pirandello’s art in general, and, as I will argue, to his dramaturgy of time in particular.
Chapter 2
Putting Theory into Practice in Six Characters in Search of an Author

There are many reasons to begin this study in earnest with Six Characters in Search of an Author. It is perhaps Pirandello’s most-studied and most-cited dramatic work. If Pirandello comes up in conversation, this play is, anecdotally, a touchstone for many. This is the play that elevated Pirandello to the level of an international dramatist. But, the best reason to include Six Characters here, in spite of the volumes that have already been devoted to it, is offered by the playwright himself. Six Characters is neither Pirandello’s first drama nor his most complex. However, in compiling all of his dramatic works into the anthology Maschere Nude (Naked Masks), Pirandello places it at the beginning, and in doing so, “indicates its centrality in the development of his poetic vision” (Santeramo 32). The poetic vision to which Santeramo alludes relies, in part, on the ontological superiority of the Pirandellian character itself, established in the 1899 text, “Spoken Action” and proceeds from the position, outlined in the preceding chapter, that “art is life, and not a process of reasoning” (Pirandello ”Spoken Action” 21). Thus, this chapter, in beginning with a play that confronts the epistemological and ontological impasse between actor and character (unsatisfying though it may be in its lack of resolution) creates a framework for this study as it tackles the more richly nuanced worlds of

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20 My translation of, “Significativamente, Pirandello collocò Sei personaggi in cerca d’autore all’inizio della raccolta completa delle sue opere teatrali, Le Maschere nude, indicandone così la centralità nello sviluppo della sua visione poetica” (Santeramo 32).

21 […] che l’arte è la vita e non un ragionamento […] (“L’azione parlata” 448).

22 I say unsatisfying because, as much as I like this play, I know that Pirandello’s reconsideration on the potential of the theatre later in his career offers a much more compelling position. After having spent time as the mounting his own works, Pirandello was better equipped to deal with the theatre as its own art form, not, as he did in his early aesthetic statements, a poor translation of literary works.
Henry IV and Tonight We Improvise in subsequent chapters. It will point out the nascent features of Pirandello’s dramaturgy of time as they are uncovered in Six Characters through the philosophical and scientific lenses presented in the introduction. This chapter will argue for a reading of the play that might be able to mitigate the failure of each individual theoretical position to account for all interpretive possibilities. I will not go through, point by point, to determine if and when this, or the following works, strictly adhere to the models of reality, temporality, or experience put forward by the Pirandello’s contemporaries in science and philosophy; instead, I will show how the convergence of these theories in Pirandello’s drama establishes the basis for the playwright’s worldview vis à vis Six Characters, demonstrating both the potential and limit of each theoretical frame.

1 A Note on the Text and its Translation

A particularly astute reader will recognize the English-language selections from Six Characters as coming from the Edward Storer translation, which is based on the 1921 edition of the play. The primary reason for this selection is almost purely practical; the Storer translation is perhaps one of the most widely available translations of the play, itself a part of Eric Bentley’s hugely popular anthology of five Pirandello plays, Naked Masks, first published in 1952. For those readers who wish to read the play in its entirety in English, the Bentley anthology is almost certainly the most readily available source.

However, I would be remiss in not expounding upon some of the differences between the 1921 and 1925 editions. While Pirandello’s alterations to the text are not so significant as to fundamentally alter or undermine my own arguments, they speak not only to Pirandello’s considerable and rapid evolution as a playwright, but to a growing fascination with the ontological status of character. In the 1925 edition, Pirandello highlights that status by furthering
the distance between the Characters themselves and how they are manifest in the world of naturalism. Influenced by the 1923 production directed by Georges Pitoëff in Paris (in which the Characters made their entrance from an old stage elevator under a strange green light), the 1925 Characters appear considerably different from their 1921 predecessors. One of the most significant revisions is in the entrance of the Characters themselves; in the earlier version, they entered via the stage door, while in 1925, they walked right through the auditorium and up on to the stage (Lorch 80). The 1921 edition offered very specific and realistic stage directions about each character’s appearance and dress; the 1925 text suggests for the Characters the use of masks as a way of making them appear not as phantasms, but that “as figures of [a] created reality immutable constructs of the imagination: more real and more consistent, because of this, than the natural and volatile ACTORS” (in Lorch 82). These masks, if executed according to Pirandello’s new direction, would indicate the “fundamental sentiment” of each character: the Father’s remorse, the Stepdaughter’s revenge, the Mother’s sorrow, etc. (Sei personaggi 27).

In this way, Pirandello’s mingles human reality with that of the Characters. By having them enter through the auditorium (where the audience resides), and attiring them so as to suggest Characters’ reality as consciously constructed, Pirandello lends weight to his earlier assertion that once a character exists, he or she is free to roam where they will—wandering into other works of art or modes of creation, inhabiting and affecting the world in which their authors, readers, or interpreters reside—and yet still resisting the fundamental and unceasing change that distinguishes human life from the life of a work of fiction. For if the Characters remove their masks, the item that represents each one’s most essential motivation, they cease to be.

23 “I Personaggi non dovranno infatti apparire come fantasmi, ma come realtà create, costruzioni della fantasia immutabili: e dunque più reali e consistenti della volubile naturalità degli Attori” (Pirandello Sei personaggi 27).
2 The Promise and Problem of Metatheatre

In addition to the place of this play in the trajectory of Pirandello’s career as a dramatist, *Six Characters* is often identified (rightly so) as a watershed moment in the development of modern drama. In particular, Pirandello’s theatre plays (two of which are included in this study) are often caught under the umbrella of metatheatre. Coined by Lionel Abel in 1963, the term “metatheatre” provides a convenient shorthand for describing theatre that is essentially about itself. Thus, in labelling a subset of Pirandello’s plays as the “metatheatrical trilogy” (*Six Characters, Each in His Own Way, and Tonight We Improvise*) the descriptor offers up some very particular assumptions and attributes as implicit in the conversation. So, before proceeding, it is necessary to ask if Pirandello’s theatre plays are at all about theatre in the way that Lionel Abel suggest. If so, great—the plays become immediately easier to discuss. If not, we’ll need to work around the term.

The term metatheatre comes from the need that Abel saw for having a word that describes,

certain plays [which] tell us at once that the happenings and characters in them are of the playwright's invention, and that insofar as they were discovered—where there is invention there also has to be discovery—they were found by the playwrights imagining rather than by his observing the world (59).

But what are the characteristics of metatheatre, as outlined by Abel? In the simplest regard, Abel identifies an inextricable link between metatheatre and tragedy, outlining the following hallmarks to distinguish one from the other. He treats tragedy and metatheatre as a dichotomy in their respective representations of reality. For example, whereas tragedy offers up something explicit about our understanding of reality and privileges the structure of the world, metatheatre characterizes reality as a projection of human consciousness and refuses to accept or acknowledge any structure as ultimate or unchanging (113). Tragedy demonstrates that human
experience is subject to the whims of fate. Metatheatre shows that man can defeat fate (113). Tragedy relies on an understanding of ultimate order. Metatheatre suggests that order is improvised by humans (113). Tragedy, in the view of Metatheatre, is “our dream of the real,” whereas metatheatre is “as real as are our dreams” (113). Tragedy lays claim to the “depth of succession,” while Metatheatre claims the “breadth of simultaneity” (citing Nicolai Hartmann, 113). Finally, tragedy transcends optimism and pessimism by adopting both positions.

Metatheatre, through wonder, makes us disregard the opposition (113).

With this in mind, how does Pirandello, and more specifically, *Six Characters in Search of an Author* fare with respect to Abel’s Metatheatre? While it might not be so outrageous to point to the necessity of self-consciousness in Abel’s Metatheatre as an undeniable feature of Pirandellian drama, the essential question that must be answered is whether or not Pirandello’s work emerges from a failure to write tragedy. Abel, as we’ve read, sees a sort of opposition at work between tragedy and metatheatre. But, that raises the need for further clarification of what tragedy is with respect to Pirandello. Tragedy has a long history; as Rebecca Bushnell notes,

> The dramatic genre of tragedy has its roots in the religion and politics of the Greek city-state, and it lives still as a profoundly social art. Tragedy’s subject is the relationship between the individual and the community in the face of a necessity that we may call the gods or history, and tragedy is performed to transform those who experience it. Tragedy’s original form was shaped as much by Athenian democracy as it was by ancient religion, and its survival in European and American culture has been intertwined with the fate of dynasties, revolutions, and crises of social change (2).

The social component of tragedy that Bushnell highlights might be the key here. What, if any, is the social dimension of Pirandello’s drama? The second play of this study, *Henry IV*, carries with it an obvious connection to the genre, possessing a discourse explicitly concerned with how people, both individually and collectively, interact with and construct their world. But the first and third plays under consideration, *Six Characters* and *Tonight We Improvise*, attend to
different, though equally perplexing issues. I would propose that the theatre plays, particularly the two included in this study, are first and foremost about art, what it is, and where it comes from—significant questions that resist easy answers already, the difficulty of which is compounded by Pirandello’s aesthetic principles and overall worldview. Art does partake of a social presence, but for the purposes of this thesis, the temporal unfolding of art across time is of primary concern, as the timelessness of the artistic impulse as it rendered and distilled in its final form. This distillation is the fundamental concern of the theatre plays, and as such, distances this study from the idea of tragedy, and subsequently from metatheatre. Not forever, of course; a dramatic text is, at the most basic level, unfinished (Turner and Behrndt 35), and there is perhaps much that can be said in favor of the alternative as a way fleshing out one’s understanding of these plays. Without going into greater detail about *Six Characters* itself, it is difficult to demonstrate how this play, so explicitly concerned with the question of how to make art (and meaning) defies Abel’s terminology. After examining the play with greater depth, this chapter, will return briefly to the question of whether or not the concept of metatheatre brings anything substantial to bear on Pirandello’s work. But for now, let’s dispense with metatheatre and its implications, which with its overt and unavoidable links to tragedy, seems too ontologically narrow to be useful here. I will instead refer to *Six Characters, Each in His Own Way*, and *Tonight We Improvise* as the “theatre-plays” or the “theatre-in-the-theatre” plays.

### 2.1 The Failure of Metatheatre and the Necessity of Humor

Metatheatre might not fully grasp the substance of Pirandello’s drama, but we are not without recourse; there are still some content-based and stylistic qualities of the plays in question that make them distinctly Pirandellian. The playwright had, even before writing *Six Characters*, set down some of the aesthetic principles that would govern his art. The most important of these
is perhaps the concept of *l’umorismo* (humor). The features of Pirandellian humor have already been outlined in the preceding chapter, but before proceeding with a proper analysis of the dramaturgy of time in *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, it is necessary to expound upon how humor manifests itself in this key dramatic text.

Pirandello’s humor rests in large part on the juxtaposition of disparate ideas, feelings or scenarios, with which *Six Characters* is saturated. Even from the first scene, the acting company and their director decry the play they are rehearsing, another work by Pirandello in which “nobody understands anything and the author plays the fool with us all” (Six Characters 213).

That inherent foolishness is where this exploration of humor in the play must begin. Pirandello offers up a patently silly premise—his titular Characters, rejected as they are at their conception, nonetheless set forth, presumably escaping the grasp of their author to make an attempt at self-determination through the dramaturgic space and tools of the theatre. From their initial rejection, only more rejection and failure could be fashioned; what is self-determination, after all, when the details of the characters’ story (stories?) are already fixed, simply lacking the form and structure afforded by a novel or a dramatic script (and the latter’s implicit completion in performance?). Pirandello writes that his characters, being born alive, wished only to live (Pirandello "Preface to Six Characters" 334), but the life they seek renders them static and unchanging—for all intents and purposes, dead. And this is a fundamental dynamic which governs the concept of humor throughout Pirandello’s works—the co-presence of different and

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24 IL DIRETTORE: Che vuole che le faccia io, se dalla Francia non ci viene più una buona commedia, e ci siamo ridotti a mettere in iscena commedie di Pirandello, in cui non si capisce nulla, fatte apposta dall’autore per ridersi di me, di lei, del pubblico (Sei personaggi 101)

25 For more details about the particular challenges and possibilities that dramaturgic space encompasses, see Darko Suvin’s article “Approach to Topoanalysis and to the Paradigmatics of Dramaturgic Space” in *Poetics Today* 8.2 (1987): 311–334.
perhaps fundamentally incompatible ways of being. As was noted in the preceding chapter, Pirandello saw this humor at work at the intersection of laughter and sympathy, as the comic reaction to a gaudily made-up old woman gave way to pity at the motives which governed her appearance (On Humor 113-115).

So, where is the humor in Six Characters? There are probably many ways to answer the question, but for now, let’s keep to the most readily identifiable manifestation of the concept in the play—the premise that The Characters, free from the influence of their author in a moment of mutual abandonment, seek out a new author to tell their story. But, the juxtaposition of the story (that is, the Characters) with the theatre troupe and its director (the new author, ostensibly) is not humor in itself.

Pirandello’s humor depends on the capacity of an observer to reflect on what she is witnessing and how her feelings toward the subject change or compound over time. It is important that while that intersection of laughter and sympathy is at the heart of this concept, it is also essential to note that laughter—the initial comic reaction—precipitates the sympathetic response. This means that in definition and structure, humor is a fundamentally temporal process. This will come as no surprise, especially as the analysis of Six Characters is accomplished through the lenses of Bergson and Husserl as they described how inner states, emotions, and experience pass through and change over time, but it is still worth identifying the temporal unfolding that is built into Pirandello’s humor at this juncture, even if the resulting feeling really is the result of the interpenetration between the comic and pity.

So, how is humor presented and further complicated in Six Characters in Search of an Author? What does the play elicit from a reader or audience that would suggest the kind of humor that Pirandello is pursuing? Getting into authorial intent is a slippery slope, for sure, but there are perhaps features of the play that perhaps suggest how humor could function. Humor, in
Pirandello’s characterization, possesses a temporal dimension, but that is too vague for our purposes. But, for the sake of a more concrete treatment, we might say that humor is essentially a consequence—of amusement, then introspection, and finally pity which exists in concert with the initial laughter.

What then, are the consequences of the intrusion of the Six Characters into the playing space? That is perhaps the question one can deal with when thinking about Six Characters, but we must think about it in ways that ground the idea of consequence in the world(s) of the play—and more importantly, not outside of it. In the realm from which the Characters originate—the world of art—consequence (or the concept thereof) is a very different matter, for as The Mother takes pains in explaining, the Characters’ story and struggle is ongoing and simultaneous. There is no order to or unfolding of the story that one might watch or read in a traditionally structured realist or melodramatic narrative, the genres which Pirandello was most directly responding to in his theatre plays (Caputi 21). It isn’t even enough to say that there is a cyclical component to the experience of the characters, and it is so far outside of normal human experience that it becomes increasingly difficult, though not impossible, to analyze. But, all at once, the Father has both followed his young Stepdaughter to school and encountered her in Madam Pace’s shop; The Mother is both blissfully ignorant and all too aware of the unsavory dealings in which Pace has forced her daughter to engage. The Little Girl is alive and dead (and not in the same the way that Schrödinger would have you understand). The whole story for the Characters is happening always, every moment, everywhere, and all at once.

So, the temporal unfolding that makes a story just that—a story—is undermined by the ontological predicament that the Characters present, and humor is the first step to sorting it out. Yes, of course, there is an ontological impasse that arises in the conflict between Director and Father, but it is mirrored within the Characters themselves; they do not only carry their story
inside of themselves, but also the problems that arise when an author seeks to set that formless story into a play or novel, as they wrestle with the possibility of losing all that defines them should they allow the actors to play their story. Which is where this analysis will move from here.

3  *Six Characters* and the Problem of Embodiment

Tilgher’s "life/form" dichotomy, as previously introduced, offers up one of the most readily identifiable features of Pirandello’s aesthetic, linking the playwright with his contemporary, Henri Bergson. This connection, as noted, is not without controversy; however, Bergson offers a promising point of entry in an analysis of *Six Characters* and Pirandello’s dramaturgy of time. Of even greater significance, Tilgher’s Bergsonian treatment of Pirandello’s work places the Sicilian among the literary and artistic luminaries of contemporary Europe, lifting Pirandello out of the provincialism that might have otherwise dogged him (Barattoni 84). Through Tilgher, Pirandello finds important theoretical and structural parallels in Bergson, from their shared interest in the configuration and purpose of humor and the comic, to the free-flowing force that drives experience and the creative process (83), a process which is constantly at risk of being stifled through language or convention.

Through the Bergsonian dichotomy of form and content (coupled with the Characters’ desire to have their story staged), we arrive at embodiment as the initial problem to contend with.

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26 Of course, Pirandello wasn’t only examining the tension between form and content as characterized by Bergson’s thoughts on perception and the body. His work, especially the conflict between the Father and Stepdaughter about the nature of the Characters’ story exemplifies what the aforementioned Russian Formalists would call *fabula* and *sjuzhet*, the former of which refers broadly to the chronological progression of events in a story, while the latter accounts for the way in which a text cues a reader to construct those events ("Fabula" n. pag.; "Sjuzhet" n. pag.). In a related sense, this pair of concepts may lead the reader to Bakhtin’s chronotope. The arrangement of space and time is fluid and manifests differently from one genre to another (Dentith 50). Thus, the nature of the story—Revenge for the Stepdaughter, Redemption for the Father—would not have been an insignificant choice, had Pirandello’s fictional theatre company been able to arrange and tell the story.
in pursuing Pirandello’s dramaturgy of time—a problem that only grows in complexity over the life of Pirandello’s career as a dramatist. This is not simply a question of an actor's ability to interpret a role, but rather an interrogation of the violence against the author's text inherent in the work which the theatre sets out to accomplish.

In conceiving the Characters as unfinished, Pirandello withholds not only a story, but a form that could aid in the communication and reception of the Characters’ predicament, be it a novel, a play, or any other work of art. As demonstrated by some of Pirandello’s early aesthetic and theoretical statements, the distillation of the artistic impulse into a work of art necessarily mitigates the expansive potential that such an impulse offers. The work of art is but one manifestation of such an impulse out of many possibilities—none of which are complete or perfect.

Pirandello, in writing *Six Characters*, created a play in which the violence of this distillation becomes the drama itself. It is, admittedly, not the best or most precise means of exploring the problem, as the company attempts at various points to render both a play text as well as its physical interpretation on the stage (while Pirandello in his earlier statements on the matter offers a slightly more linear understanding of the process as it moves from inspiration, to text, and finally to action). Nonetheless, the problem is clear: the Characters are to be understood as *l'azione parlata* which inspires lively dramatic dialogue, and as the “people… living free and active”27 (“Spoken Action” 28) that create the play itself, and make it not a simply interesting play, but an authentic work of art which preserves the spoken action that Pirandello identifies as the heart of good drama.

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27 “le persone: vive, libere, operanti” (*L'azione parlata* 449).
In *Six Characters*, the mechanism by which the Characters attempt, and fail to have their story told, is that of embodiment—the Characters invade the space of the actors, and ask them to tell a story with their bodies and voices. With this request, and in light of Tilgher’s work, it is appropriate that I turn my attention to Henri Bergson, and Pirandello’s undeniable debt to this contemporary (Caputi 18). Bergson identified the body as “an ever advancing boundary between the future and the past,” (Bergson *Matter and Memory* 88) and it is with this consideration that the temporal implications which Pirandello’s Six Characters face can truly be examined.

Beginning with Bergson’s *Essai*, there are two concepts of time which he presents—Spatialized Time and *Dureé*. Bergson explores duration first through “inner experience”—sensations, affects, etc.—things which cannot be quantifiably evaluated and he “makes an argument for freedom against determinist thinking through this appeal to time, […establishing] a horizon of immediate experience—pre-linguistic and qualitative” (Guerlac 88). These qualitative and pre-linguistic aspects of duration make Bergson’s considerations of time an appealing lens through which to read *Six Characters*, particularly with respect to what both the Characters and the Actors try and fail to accomplish. The *Essai*, and Bergson’s comments on the nature of *dureé* guide the reader to contemplate experience that is unmediated through language or quantitative assessments—a “realness” that resists symbolization (42).

In contrast, spatialized, quantifiable time imposes a framework on these flowing, internal, experiences, ordering them after the fact, and representing them in such a way that they can only be conceived of as discrete moments, which have boundaries—in effect, clock-time. Counting is analogous to this—when we count objects and accumulate a sum, we ignore the individual characteristic of each individual object. Then we situate these objects in an imagined space in which they are effectively made equal. To count, we hold those things which we have previously counted in our minds, and juxtapose them in this imagined space. Thus, we count in
space rather than time and the juxtaposition of objects necessitates space (and can only happen within it, even if it is an imagined one). As Susan Guerlac succinctly puts it, “counting requires juxtaposition, juxtaposition implies simultaneity, and simultaneity presupposes space” (62).

Mediation and juxtaposition then become the first problem for the Characters. They have brought their story to be told, but do not (and cannot) understand what that pursuit actually entails. They have, both figuratively and literally, asked to be put into space, and further, into a space in which they were never intended to thrive. They have asked to be translated into the language of the stage, and here our problems begin to unfold. In presenting themselves as they do, the Characters insist that they have a story, but in actuality, they have six. Of course, these share events, moments, and characters, but the perspective that each has on their own version of events differs. For example, in the scene at the back of Madame Pace’s shop, the Father encounters The Stepdaughter, by then forced into prostitution, and The Mother interferes with his advances. The Father wants to redeem himself, the Stepdaughter wants to punish him, and The Mother cannot help but despair at the situation her daughter is in and the circumstances which made it inevitable. But, more importantly, when performing the scene for the Actors, the Mother’s anguish is something wholly beyond capture:

**THE MOTHER:** *(changing her low plaint into a sharp cry).* No! No! Don't permit it, sir, don't permit it!
**THE MANAGER:** But it's only to try it.
**THE MOTHER:** I can't bear it. I can't.
**THE MANAGER:** But since it has happened already ... I don't understand!
**THE MOTHER:** It's taking place now. It happens all the time. My torment isn't a pretended one. I live and feel every minute of my torture. Those two children there—have you heard them speak? They can't speak any more. They cling to me to keep my torment actual and vivid for me. But for themselves, they do not exist, they aren't any more. And she *(indicating Step-Daughter)* has run away, she has left me, and is lost. If I now see her here before me, it is only to renew for me the tortures I have suffered for her too.
THE FATHER: The eternal moment! She (indicating the Step-Daughter) is here to catch me, fix me, and hold me eternally in the stocks for that one fleeting and shameful moment of my life (Six Characters 260).

In asking the company to give order and life to their story, to set the scenes, juxtapose them one by one, to fix them in the language of stage, what is lost is the very sense of what it is to be a character, to be present in every moment of the story, to have an existence which is happening all at once and forever—in effect, to always be resisting the linguistic or formal conventions that remove the character from the realm of timelessness into a context that is at best immediate and timely, and at worst, dated. That is something that the actors are unable to understand and something that the theatre cannot accommodate, itself being a medium expressed and experienced across time. The magnitude of the characters suffering resists the symbolization that is at the center of the actors' work, not only because of the tragic circumstances of their story, but because of the conditions which, ontologically speaking, precludes those characters from being complete and finished (ever).

Their desire to have their story told on stage and in space and time also confronts us with another problem—the body itself. To Bergson, "the body is an instrument of action, not representation" (Guerlac 168). As one of the primary aspects of the actor's responsibility is to represent a character (even if we call that representation "acting"), we can already surmise how

\[\text{Footnotes:}\]
\[28\] LA MADRE: (levandosi dal suo pianto, con un urlo) No, no! Non lo permetta, signore! Non lo permetta!
IL DIRETTORE: Ma è solo per vedere, adesso, signora!
LA MADRE: Io non posso! non posso!
IL DIRETTORE: Ma se è già tutto avvenuto, scusi! Non capisco!...
LA MADRE: No, avviene ora, avviene sempre! Il mio strazio non è finito, signore! Io sono viva e presente sempre, in ogni momento del mio strazio, che si rinnova, vivo e presente sempre. Ma quei due piccini là…li ha lei sentiti parlare? Non possono più parlare, signore! Se ne stanno aggirati a me, ancora, per tenermi vivo e presente lo strazio: ma essi, per sé, non sono, non sono più! E questa (indica la FIGLIASTRA), signore, se n’è fuggita, è scappata via da me e s’è perduta del tutto! Se ora io me la vedo qua, è ancora per questo, solo per questo, sempre, sempre, per rinnovarmi sempre, vivo e presente, lo strazio che ho sofferto anche per lei!
IL PADRE: Il momento eterno! Come le ho detto io, signore! Lei (indica la FIGLIASTRA) è qui per cogliermi, fissarmi, tenermi agganciato e sospeso in eterno, alla gogna, in quel solo momento fuggevole e vergognoso della mia vita. Non può rinunziarvi, e lei, signore, non può veramente risparmiarmelo (Sei personaggi 141).
the actor's body may get in the way of the Characters as they try to have their story told. But why is the actor's body or even the idea of embodiment so problematic not only in Pirandello's earliest statements on theatre, but also in his theatrical works as well?

The answer is precisely what Bergson outlines in *Matter and Memory* as the position of the body in the present as the threshold of future and past, and the roles that change and memory play in the sensation of passing time. When perception and memory meet in the body, they fundamentally inform and revise one another. But the characters are life without form; that is, we can see and hear the Characters as they present themselves onstage (and we can also see that, in spite of their protestations, they are being played by actors who don’t cease to be once the play is over). But, they are without temporal and spatial constraints that demarcate life (which, as Heidegger will offer, the most potent of these is the awareness of death). Thus, the moment at which the characters are played in space, that is, when the life that drives them is given a form and structure that transpire across time, that transformation which occurs is not simply one that diminishes their existences, but one that fully undermines the truth that they carry with them about the nature of creativity, meaning, illusion and reality,

**THE FATHER:** It's only to show you that if we (*indicating the Characters*) have no other reality beyond the illusion, you too must not count overmuch on your reality as you feel it today, since, like that of yesterday, it may prove an illusion for you tomorrow.

**THE MANAGER:** (*determining to make fun of him*). Ah, excellent! Then you'll be saying next that you, with this comedy of yours that you brought here to act, are truer and more real than I am.

**THE FATHER:** (*with the greatest seriousness*). But of course; without doubt!

**THE MANAGER:** Ah, really?

**THE FATHER:** Why, I thought you'd understand that from the beginning.

**THE MANAGER:** More real than I?

**THE FATHER:** If your reality can change from one day to another....

**THE MANAGER:** But everyone knows it can change. It is always changing, the same as anyone else's.
THE FATHER: *(with a cry).* No, sir, not ours! Look here! That is the very difference! Our reality doesn't change: it can't change! It can't be other than what it is, because it is already fixed for ever. It's terrible. *(Six Characters 265-266).*

The Actors, ostensibly human and for whom real life means change, and for whom the sharing of a narrative across time and in a performance space is a livelihood, cannot understand an existence from which time and change are removed. But, this is precisely what the Characters wish the actors to achieve: to transcend the epistemological and ontological constraints upon which the theatre is predicated, where context, the structure of plot, and the nature of conflict define meaning, and in which the characters are only able “to be” for the duration of the play and through the presence of the actors on stage (and by extension the co-presence of their fellow performers and the audience). The Actors, in filtering the Characters’ story and the pain of their existence through the narrative structures and temporal progression necessitated by the confines of theatrical convention and practice offer the Characters a chance at intelligibility.

But as a result, we find that the disaster which marks the Characters, at their origin, as destined for incompletion, is translated into a catastrophe, as the actors in trying to make the Characters fit the boundaries of their world and their craft, diminish the magnitude and novelty of the drama into something conventional, rigid, and lifeless. For example, when the Father learns that the Leading Man of the company will be playing him, he (gently) offers the...
following objection, saying, “It will be difficult to act me as I really am. The effect will be rather—apart from the make-up—according to how he supposes I am, as he senses me—if he does sense me—and not as I inside myself feel to be”\(^{30}\) (Six Characters 245). And of course, it will be as the actor playing the character senses his role—there is no preparation on earth which could allow one person to fully revise how time and change shape their perception of the world and of themselves.

Even so, the perception of time’s flow proves to be one of the most significant components of self-consciousness and self-understanding. As was just demonstrated, the Characters and Actors experience time in vastly different ways, precluding the possibility for mutual understanding and the communication of both personal and dramatic narrative.

4 \textit{Six Characters}, Continuity, and Internal Time Consciousness

There is much more to say on the role of the body, and on the larger project of determining the essence of being itself, but at this juncture, deeper understanding of the role of time consciousness, might be particularly useful. Edmund Husserl’s phenomenology of time consciousness speaks in particular to the complicated sort of life with which Pirandello imbues his characters. Husserl’s characterization of time consciousness, much like Bergson’s work on time, free will and memory, stems from continuous act of perceiving through which individuals engage with their world. In Pirandello’s view, authentic characters possess their own lives and can have ideological positions on the stories of which they are a part, if only to set aside for a moment the question of whether or not characters are able to perceive in the first place. As was

\footnotesize{\textit{Il Padre}: Ecco, difficilmente potrà essere una rappresentazione di me, com’io realmente sono. Sarà piuttosto—a parte la figura—sarà piuttosto com’egli interpretarà ch’io sia, com’egli mi sentirà—se mi sentirà—e non com’io dentro di me mi sento, ecco. (Sei personaggi 128).}
established in the preceding paragraphs, the Characters are ontologically different from the human actors they confront; the nature of their experience is foreign, but we cannot outright dismiss that experience outright for simple lack of understanding.

So, let’s begin by affording the nature of the Characters’ experience and perception the utmost respect, and approach the Characters’ experience with the seriousness and thoroughness that Husserl affords conscious entities and temporal objects. In Husserl’s view, the structure of time consciousness and the philosopher’s work in general, emerges from his critique of psychologism, which characterizes the work of epistemology as “concerned with the cognitive nature of perceiving, believing, judging, and knowing” and as such are psychical phenomena which can and should be explored under the purview of psychology (Zahavi 8). To Husserl, this assertion ignores distinction between psychology and logic that is of central importance (8). Logic deals in “certainty and exactness” and in structure and laws (8). Psychology, on the other hand, “investigates the factual nature of consciousness, and its results are therefore characterized by the same vagueness and mere probability that marks the results of all the other empirical sciences” (9).

Psychologism is, to Husserl, not without its failings. Husserl claims that the central problem of psychologism is its inability to distinguish between the object of knowledge and the act of knowing (9). If psychologism amounts to, in part, a way of thinking that combines logic and psychology, the problem becomes immediately apparent. Logic works on the basis of mathematical certainties—the ideal—that are not affected by time or duration; psychology, when delving into the realm of consciousness and thought, venture into the realm of the real (9). How can it be possible to use the language and methods of the real to accurately express what is ideal, and vice versa? Husserl maintains that for knowledge to be possible, there are certain conditions that must be met, which he refers to as the objective (logical) or subjective (noetic) (10) and
responds to these failings with the concept of Intentionality, which begins to tackle the question of what it means to be conscious. Extending and augmenting some of Franz Brentano’s work on the topic, Husserl’s work on intentionality reveals that within the structure of human experience, it is necessary to account for the “object-directedness” of thought, which he calls “intentionality” (14; 21). Dan Zahavi’s brief definition of the term is possibly the clearest: “Intentionality is the relation between consciousness and its object” (15). There are a number of ways to describe the intentional act, but it boils down to one essential feature: “Every intentional experience is an experience of a specific type, be it an experience of hoping, desiring, remembering, affirming, doubting, fearing, and the like” (23). In short, the way we think about an object is part of that object’s reality for us, and here is where the logical and noetic conditions seem to resolve into one unified experience. When we consider this in the larger context of phenomenology, it becomes clear that the discrete, objective features (weight, composition, etc.) of an object are of little import (54). It is instead more useful to consider how these objects “show themselves, that is, in their modes of givenness” and most importantly, how such objects appear to us specifically (54-55). This marks phenomenology as a primarily descriptive method rather than a deductive one (67). Given the object-oriented, descriptive nature of phenomenology, and the way it might describe the peculiarity of the time-consciousness of

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31 Husserl was not the only person working on intentionality. He borrowed the concept from Franz Brentano, but it was also receiving considerable attention from the Prague Linguistic Circle, as they built upon the works of the Russian Formalists, including Jakobson. Jan Mukafévský characterizes the work of art as an “intentional creation” and noting that intentionality in most practical activities “expresses itself primarily as a tendency toward a specific aim that is to be attained by a given activity” (89; 93). However, with respect to artistic creation, Mukafévský notes that intentionality manifests differently, since “products [of artistic creation] are not oriented toward any specific external goal but are themselves the goal. This is valid even when we realize that a work of art can acquire secondarily-on account of its extra-aesthetic functions which are, however, subordinate to the aesthetic function-a relation to the most varied external aims” (94). In short, the objects of the artistic process are the goal, not a means to achieving a goal.
character, it is important to ask if and how intentionality might figure into Pirandello’s Six Characters, as considered in the drama.

The question is not a simple one, as Pirandello offers up characters that he claims to be alive, ("Preface to Six Characters" 364-365) but that are still bound to the story they wish to tell and confined by the text currently under scrutiny. Furthermore, one character cannot leave the party and set out on his or her own, as Son’s desire to leave constantly confronts his inability to do so:

THE SON: (to the Manager who stops him). I’ve got nothing to do with this affair. Let me go please! Let me go!
THE MANAGER: What do you mean by saying you’ve got nothing to do with this?
THE STEP-Doughter: (calmly, with irony). Don’t bother to stop him: he won’t go away.
THE FATHER: He has to act the terrible scene in the garden with his mother
The Son: [suddenly resolute and with dignity] I shall act nothing at all. I’ve said so from the very beginning. (To the Manager) Let me go!

THE STEP-Doughter: (going over to the Manager). Allow me. (Puts down THE SON’s arm which is restraining THE SON.) Well, go away then, if you want to! (The SON looks at her with contempt and hatred. She laughs and says.) You see, he can’t, he can’t go away! He is obliged to stay here, indissolubly bound to the chain. If I, who fly off when that happens which has to happen, because I can’t bear him—if I am still here and support that ace and expression of his, you can well imagine that he is unable to move (Six Characters 272).32

32 IL FIGLIO: (al DIRETTORE che lo trattiene) Non ho proprio nulla io da far qui! Me ne lasci andare, la prego! Me ne lasci andare!
IL DIRETTORE: Come non ha nulla da fare?
LA FIGLIASTRA: (placidamente, con ironia) Ma non lo trattenga! Non se ne va!
IL PADRE: Deve rappresentare la terribile scena del giardino con sua madre!
IL FIGLIO: (subito, risoluto, fieramente) Io non rappresento nulla! E l’ho dichiarato fin da principio! (Al DIRETTORE:) Me ne lasci andare!

LA FIGLIASTRA: (accorrendo al DIRETTORE) Permette, signore? (Gli farà abbasare le braccia, con cui trattiene IL FIGLIO) Lo lasci! (Poi, rivolgendosi a lui, appena IL DIRETTORE lo avrà lasciato) Ebbene, vattene! (IL FIGLIO resta, guardandola con sprezzo, anzi con odio. Ella ride e dice) —Non può, vede? non può, signore! Deve restar qui, per forza, legato alla catena, indissolubilmente. Ma se io che prendo il volo, signore, quando accade ciò che deve accadere – proprio per l’odio che sento per lui, proprio per non vedermetlo più davanti – ebbene, se io sono ancora qua, e sopporto la sua vista e la sua compagnia – si figuri se può andarsene via lui che deve, deve restar qua veramente con questo suo bel padre, e quella madre là, senza più altri figli che lui... (Rivolgendosi alla MADRE) —E su, su, mamma! Vieni... (Rivolgendosi al DIRETTORE per indicargliela) —Guardi, s’era alzata, s’era alzata per trattenerlo... (Alla MADRE, chiamandola con la mano) —Vieni, vieni... (Poi, al DIRETTORE:) – Immagini che cuore può aver lei di mostrare qua ai suoi attori quello che prova; ma è tanta la brama d’accostarsi a lui, che – eccola qua – è disposta a vivere la sua scena! (Sei personaggi 151-152).
As the Characters play out their story again and again, and still all at once, it becomes clear how time takes up a central role in intentionality and in Husserl’s phenomenology. We have not yet left behind the idea of intentionality or its object-oriented nature. In fact, time draws our understanding of intentionality towards a greater fullness. For Husserl, the most basic requirement of an intentional object is that it is composed of a "a set of appearances put together by the mind according to rules" (McCumber 140). But, Husserl separates himself from his predecessors by identifying time as the most basic of intentional objects, one that is synthesized by the mind even as it appears external and independent of the individual (140).

It is through the process of synthesizing that the problem of time consciousness starts to crystalize with respect to Pirandello’s characters. In particular, the construction of identity is the product of synthesis, itself a kind of temporal extension, whether or not we are focused on an object (i.e. an object which we look at from different angles to understand its different presentations, the result of which is not a disjointed collection of images, but the impression of a single, contiguous object) or the more nuanced construction of personal identity (Husserl 87). In the case of any experience, Husserl points to the relationship of time-consciousness in understanding the relationship between perception and recollection. Whereas perception “is the act which places something before our eyes,” re-presentation (that is memory or recollection) is another encounter with the intentional object, this time with its whole temporal extension (Husserl 43; 48). The role of memory in the construction of identity (not to mention the whole of consciousness itself) is a key feature of Husserl’s phenomenology of internal time consciousness, because perception and memory are never truly distinct from one another; as Husserl notes in his comments on the “double intentionality of recollection:”

Naturally the whole is reproduced, not only the then-present of consciousness with its flow but “implicite” the whole stream of consciousness up to the living present. That means […] that memory flows continuously, since the life of
consciousness flows continuously and does not merely piece itself together link by link into a chain (56).

However, Pirandello necessarily confuses the relationship between perception and memory in his exploration of the identity and constitution of character, as demonstrated by The Mother’s anguish at seeing the Step-Daughter and the Father in Madame Pace’s shop or The Son’s inability to leave the party (Pirandello Six Characters 260; 272). The Characters’ identity as characters, alive thought they may be, seems to preclude the conventional synthesis of identity or experience that Husserl sees as the central to cohesive consciousness. As the Father notes, “one may be “born to life, in many forms, in many shapes, as tree, or as stone, as butterfly, or as woman […] so one may also be born a character in a play” (Six Characters 217). Yet, this birth from the playwright’s fantasy inextricably ties the characters to the story that accounts for their actions. The Characters, not bounded by a conventional existence with a distinct end, are instead confined by narrative form, in which actions and experiences are structured according to the decisions of the playwright and the goals of the drama. The characters may, in a way, live forever, but, with an identity that has already been constructed for them and in the midst of a predetermined series of events which makes them, if not recognizable, certainly distinct from the ostensibly human theatre makers to which the Characters are making their appeal:

THE FATHER: […] The man, the writer, the instrument of the creation will die, but his creation does not die. And to live for ever, it does not need to have extraordinary gifts or to be able to work wonders. Who was Sancho Panza? Who was Don Abbondio? Yet they live eternally because—live germs as they were—they had the fortune to find a fecundating matrix, a fantasy which could raise and nourish them: make them live forever (Six Characters 218).33

33 IL PADRE: […] Dimostrarle che si nasce alla vita, in tanti modi, in tante forme: albero o sasso, acqua o farfalle… o donna. E che si nasce anche personaggi! (Sei personaggi 104).

34 IL PADRE: […] Morrà l’uomo, lo scrittore, strumento della creazione; la creatura non muore più! E per vivere eterna non ha neanche bisogno di straordinarie doti o di compiere prodigi. Chi era Sancho Panza? Chi era don Abbondio? Eppure vivono eterni, perché—vivi germi—ebbero la ventura di trovare una matrice feconda, una fantasia che li seppe allevare e nutrire: far vivere per l’eternità! (Sei personaggi 105).
The Characters require an outside, creative entity to give order and meaning to their story, to let narrative structure give weight and gravity to the words and circumstances that they believe make them compelling dramatic entities. Their author, in abandoning them, stripped them of the “fecundating matrix” that allowed figures like Sancho Panza or Don Abbondio to take their place in the canon of Western Literature. In lieu of an author or playwright, the Characters seek out actors, who, if the playwright had completed his work, would portray them on stage.

But it is not an easy appeal. There is a profound epistemological impasse between actor and Character, first outlined in the 1908 text “Illustrators, Actors, and Translators” and marked by the imposition of a sort of synthesis that is rooted in the Characters unparalleled experience of the passage of time (or lack thereof). In examining the structures of time consciousness, it is clear that succession and successiveness are essential features of experience and of the constitution of temporal objects, as Husserl’s structure of time consciousness will demonstrate momentarily. Temporal objects, “have a temporal extensions and whose different aspects cannot exist simultaneously but only appear across time, for instance, melodies” (Zahavi 81).

While Husserl took up the idea of intentionality from Brentano he departs from his predecessor on the subject of temporal objects; in opposition to Brentano’s imagination as the method by which we understand these objects, Husserl instead offers up the *width of presence* which allows us to perceive temporal objects as they extend themselves across time (82). Husserl identifies three structures of time consciousness that account for our own sense of change across time: Primal Impression, Protention, and Retention. Primal impression consists of the “moment of the concrete act that is narrowly directed toward the now-phase of the object” (83). Situated at the “temporal horizon,” the primal impression itself does not allow for a perception of a temporal object (83). Instead, it is understood by its association in conjunction
with protention and retention. Protention is “a more or less indefinite intention of the phase of the object about to occur” (83) and retention, the “intention that provides us with a consciousness of the phase of the object that has just been” (83). Protention and retention are not the same as expectation and recollection (83). Expectation (and similarly, anticipation) and recollection can be independent of the current moment, while protention and retention are bound up in it, and cannot provide the individual “with new intentional objects, but with a consciousness of the temporal horizon of the present object” (83). While this kind of successiveness is perhaps a reasonable account of human experience and the construction of personal identity, it becomes an incredibly complicated matter for the Six Characters as Pirandello has constructed them.

Identity itself can be a temporal object, but as previously demonstrated, not only is the identity of the Character tied explicitly to the structure and progression of their story’s plot (and, not by chance, the doling out of parts to the actors is dictated by the positions the performers hold in the company, by virtue of their presumed proficiency in interpreting the stock characters that they are assigned). So, then, can a character be considered a kind of temporal object, and if so, what do time and intentionality mean in the “being” of a character?

As far as the Characters’ status as temporal objects are concerned, they probably do not fulfill the requirements of such objects as they stand, uncontextualised and without narrative structure. After all, Aristotle says that plot is soul of tragedy (63). Now, I’m not going to do an Aristotelian analysis of Six Characters, but it’s probably worth saying that a character needs a story to be a character. In the verist theatre to which Pirandello was writing in response, we see stories that take one character as a central point of access with which the audience can identify or at least use as a lens into the story. Pirandello’s problem is that his rejected characters don’t have that particular story yet. They have many stories which share the same events and individuals,
but with no clear protagonist or antagonist. Each character, particularly the Father and Stepdaughter, is the center of his or her own story.

But, does the presence of a story make a character a temporal object, or is it the story itself that is a temporal object? The Characters, feeling their story is happening at all times, object to the imposition of a narrative framework that would render their story as having a kind of historical dimension. But, while it would be unwise to disregard how we generally speak of the passage of time and events (and the mechanical measures that we impose on them by way of clocks and calendars), Husserl has demonstrated that the experience of time and the phenomenology of time consciousness do not necessarily require these kinds of constraints to be ordered and interpreted (Zahavi 81). Husserl’s phenomenology of internal time-consciousness attempts to clarify an essential ontological question; Pirandello’s play is primarily concerned with the question of what it means “to be” in both a broad regard, and as we’ll see soon, what impact the Character’s collective status as a (potential) work of art has on the activity of being vis-à-vis Heidegger’s comments on the origin of the work of art.

In any case, works of art like plays (Pirandello’s or others’) reside firmly in the realm of temporal objects; reading or watching a play is an experience with temporal extension and the audience or reader needs time to synthesize the story or the events in the work. Memory becomes part of that experience as well; the act re-encountering those works we might be familiar with already requires that every re-reading or re-watching is a new experience, colored by present circumstances, making it characteristically different from the original (and marked as chronologically distant from that original engagement). So, at the very least, the Characters are an aspect of the temporal object that Pirandello (and subsequent translations, adaptations, and productions of the play) has created. But the status of the Characters as temporal objects
themselves, like their ostensibly human counterparts in the fictitious theatrical company, is still elusive.

And perhaps it should remain this way. The analysis doesn’t fall apart in failing to answer this question, it only demonstrates again how Pirandello was working at the intersections of prevailing theories of time and being. From here, it would perhaps be better to deal with *Six Characters* and its titular sextet in their capacity as entities that were consciously and collectively created to address a shortcoming of the naturalist stage. In short, they were created as, or in the service of, art, of which Martin Heidegger has much to say.

5 The Ontological Status of Character; Heidegger on Time, History and Art

To this point, my analysis of *Six Characters in Search* has set aside the Characters’ status as fictional, consciously created works of art. As this progresses, this particular ontological consideration will take on greater importance, but before this can happen, this section requires further clarification on Heidegger’s foundational ideas on time and being. As far as the status of the work of art is concerned, Anthony Petruzzi’s discussion of *Six Characters* and hermeneutic retrieval will become particularly valuable, but the nature of being (which itself brings much to bear on the world of art) requires further attention. Heidegger uses the term *Dasein*—“being-there”—to speak to a very particular understanding of ontology. It is constituted by the following conditions

1. being thrown “into a world not of its choosing, already delivered over to the task of living out its life in a concrete context” (Guignon "Martin Heidegger" 318),
2. a projection into the future in which *Dasein* takes a “stand on its life by acting in the world” ("Martin Heidegger" 318)
3. a discursive element to *Dasein* in which “we are always articulating [. . .] the entities that show up in our concernful absorption in current situations” (318). *Dasein* is not a thing but the “happening” of a life course “stretched out between birth and death” ("Martin Heidegger" 318).
It is in the midst of this happening stretched out between birth and death that Pirandello’s problematic dramaturgy of time truly begins to come into focus. The Six Characters are born into a situation not of their choosing, and in response, they act, pursuing a means by which they might become into the fullest expression of themselves—the search for authenticity that is at the heart of Heidegger’s conception of being and Dasein’s most extreme possibility (Heidegger *Concept of Time* 10E). But, the Characters initially approach the stage as a possibility to live, only to learn instead that the fixity and structure its conventions would impose would in effect mean a kind of death—the ultimate possibility of Dasein and the end point of which Dasein is always aware if authenticity is to be achieved; it is, in part, the fixity of death (for the Characters, the fixity of the stage) which undermines the Characters’ ability to engage with the efforts of the actors successfully.

Additionally, the discursive element of Dasein eludes the Characters almost immediately. Dasein requires the time with one another; and it is led by social codes which gives meaning to its being, as a condition of being-with-one-another (*Concept of Time* 17E). The Characters are deprived of these codes of behavior which govern their interactions with the world by virtues of being denied a narrative context, and they then project themselves into a world which operates on a set of codes and an understanding of being in time that fundamentally differs from the world for which they may have been intended, but was ultimately withheld from them. Like Bergson’s body, Dasein encounters the world, itself, and everything in the present—it is oriented toward the future, but is not the future.

*Dasein* does not simply exist as a discrete entity; it becomes—until it is finished. Events happen in time, but they do not have time (*Concept of Time* 18E). Time’s direction is “singular and irreversible,” with everything rolling “out of an infinite future into an irretrievable past”
The Characters have no sense of this, as their story happens always and at one, with the events of their tragedy not so much as unfolding, but as presenting as simultaneous, and so the Mother confronting The Father as he encounters his Stepdaughter in a brothel occurs at the same moment at which she learns of the death of her two youngest children.

In attempting to seek completion in embodied performance, the disastrous rejection which sets into motion the search for an author resolves itself into the catastrophic failure that is the Actor’s attempts to set those characters into a play. Through analyzing the ontological and epistemological impasse between character and author through the concept of time and temporality, I have tried to explain how the making of Pirandello’s sextet “more real and less true” through embodiment is a fundamentally traumatic process and that the Characters’ shared origin in rejection finds its only fitting resolution in the being un-resolved. It is only in their displacement from time, place, and narrative that these characters can offer something fundamentally new to the stage and to the stories we choose to tell on it.

While *Six Characters* might be considered a work of Pirandello’s maturity, it is worth remembering that this is his first dramatic exploration of the ontological status of characters. It is very much in keeping with much earlier aesthetic statements (“Spoken Action” [1899]; “Illustrators, Actors, and Translators” [1908]), and so bears the suspicion towards the theatre that marked the theoretical work of Pirandello’s youth. In addition, while this is the earliest of Pirandello’s major dramas to deal explicitly with the origin and nature of character, Pirandello had already begun to address the topic in his career as a novelist and short-story author with a series of works that predate *Six Characters* by at least 15 years. These works include a trilogy of short stories—*Personaggi* (1906), *La tragedia di un personaggio* (1911), and *Colloqio coi Personaggi* (1915)—that explicitly consider the nature of character and the creative process, as
well as fragments of the novel (c.1917) for which the domestic drama of *Six Characters* was intended (Bonino's introduction, *Sei personaggi* viii-x).

When it comes to a character then, it is clear that Pirandello has his own ideas of what such an entity might consist. In “Spoken Action,” Pirandello praised the miraculous nature of the characters of Greek drama and the plays of Shakespeare, likening them to those found in Heinrich Heine’s poem *Geoffrey Rudel and Melisande of Tripoli*, writing, “through the miracle of art, characters should step out from the written pages, alive in their own right, just as the Lord of Blay and the Countess of Tripoli stepped down from that ancient tapestry” (Pirandello "Spoken Action" 21). The source of such lively characters is,

> a language that can be found which is itself spoken action, the living word that moves, the expression of immediacy at one with action, the single phrase that must belong uniquely to a given character in a given situation: words, expressions, phrases that are not invented but are born when the author is fully at one with his creation so as to feel what it feels and desire what it desires ("Spoken Action" 21).  

Pirandello’s requirements for a successful dramatic character, poetic as they are, also precede his major dramatic works by nearly two decades, and so do not immediately get us closer to the practical dimension of realizing the characters in theatrical performance. While the epistemological and ontological impasse between actor and character further highlight the particular kind of “being” that marks each one’s existence, the question of being (and the constitution of time) would evolve significantly over the course of Heidegger’s career, and just

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35 “Dalle pagine scritte del dramma i personaggi, per prodigio d'arte, dovrebbero uscire, staccarsi vivi, semoventi, come dall’arazzo antico il signor di Blaia e la contessa di Tripoli” ("L’azione parlata" 448).

36 “[...] che si trovi cioè la parola che sia l'azione stessa parlata, la parola viva che muova, l'espressione immediata, connaturata con l'azione, la frase unica, che non può esser che quella, propria a quel dato personaggio in quella data situazione: parole, espressioni, frasi che non s'inventano, ma che nascono, quando l’autore si sia veramente immedesimato con la sua creatura fino a sentirla com'essa si sente, a volerla com'essa si vuole” ("L'azione parlata" 448).
as *Six Characters* bears a striking thematic similarity to the aesthetic statements of Pirandello, so does it speak thematically to the work of Heidegger’s early career. One such work, the 1915 lecture “The Concept of Time in the Science of History,” contends with the very particular conception and application of time in science—specifically physics—and history/historiography. While to this point, the constitution of time and temporality have been at the heart of this analysis of *Six Characters*, what Heidegger is proposing in this document is what the purpose of time is in these two disciplines—not an unimportant concern, and one that may serve as a point of contact between the philosophical and scientific concerns this study, as a whole, intends to address.

The role of time is necessitated by the goals of each discipline, as Heidegger notes, writing, “the way knowledge is discovered in the particular sciences—i.e., the method guiding their research—is determined by the object of the respective science and the viewpoint from which it is examined” (Heidegger "Science of History" 62). Simply put, physics aims to make the “phenomena of motion” mathematically understandable ("Science of History" 64), and to that end, time makes it possible to measure the movement of objects through space ("Science of History" 66). In physics, time becomes homogenous.

On the other hand, human beings possess the capacity to “actualize the idea of culture,” and to make this actualization to unfold across time, and it is this process that is at the heart of the study of history ("Science of History" 68). In the most basic regard, Heidegger’s characterization of the study of history is that of objectification, and an essential feature of this pursuit is that the object of study no longer exists; as Heidegger writes, “a temporal divide separates the historian from the past” ("Science of History" 68-69). Additionally, the two major tasks of history are as follows: to “guarantee the factuality [*Tatsächlichkeit*] of the occurrences it
hast to represent,” ("Science of History” 69) and “spelling out the context of the already
established individual facts” ("Science of History” 70).

While it may seem analogous to this study of Six Characters, it is the problem of time in
the study of history and the two major tasks of the project of history—especially the process of
objectification—that will begin to get us a bit closer to an understanding of Pirandello’s
dramaturgy of time in this principally important drama. At the outset, it seems clear that the two
tasks find a correlation in the project the Characters set before the theatre company. The first
concern, that of factuality, plays out in the conflict between the Father and the Stepdaughter—
perhaps most predictably, as the most fleshed-out characters of the group ("Preface to Six
Characters" 367). Each one argues for the kind of story they wish the play would tell. The sort
of stories each Character articulates is situated at the center of are qualitatively different, as
demonstrated moments after the Characters’ entrance, as the Father and Stepdaughter make their
appeal to the company:

THE MANAGER: I don’t understand this at all.
THE FATHER: Naturally enough. I would ask you, sir, to exercise your authority a little here, and let me speak before you believe all she is trying to blame me with. Let me explain.
THE STEP-DAUGHTER: Ah yes, explain it in your own way.
THE FATHER: But don’t you see that the whole trouble lies here. In words, words. Each of us has within him a whole world of things, each man of us his own special world. And how can we ever come to an understanding if I put in the words I utter the sense and value of things as I see them; while you who listen to me must inevitably translate them according to the conception of things each one of you has within himself. We think we understand each other, but we never really do (Six Characters 223-224).37

37 IL DIRETTORE: Ma io non comprendo più nulla!
IL PADRE: Sfido! Assaltato così! Imponga un po’ d’ordine, signore, e lasci che parli io, senza prestare ascolto all’obbrobrio, che con tanta ferocia costei le vuol dare a intendere di me, senza le debite spiegazioni!
LA FIGLIASTRA: Qui non si narra! qui non si narra!
IL PADRE: Ma io non narro! voglio spiegargli.
LA FIGLIASTRA: Ah, bello, sì! A modo tuo!
IL PADRE: Ma se è tutto qui il male! Nelle parole! Abbiamo tutti dentro un mondo di cose; ciascuno un suo mondo di cose! E come possiamo intenderci, signore, se nelle parole ch’io dico metto il senso e il valore delle cose come sono
Setting aside the explicit problems with language and communication Pirandello raises in this passage, it is clear that the Characters have concerns about the truth of the story they wish to tell—the first task of the study of history. The factuality of the events the Characters wish to relate is undermined by their status as rejected by their author. Pirandello, in his 1925 preface to the play, describes the seemingly mysterious origins of his Characters, writing,

I can only say, that, without having made any effort to seek them out, I found before me, alive […] the six characters now seen on the stage. And they stayed there in my presence, each with his secret torment and all bound together by one common origin and mutual entanglement of their affairs […] Born alive, they wished to live ("Preface to Six Characters" 364).

Thus, Pirandello presents to us characters who see themselves alive, and the stage as the site where that life might play out. This conception, while aesthetically significant, ultimately proves a problem, as the process of ordering and staging their story does not offer the kind of life they seek, but rather the opposite. We’ve already seen shades of this through the lens of Bergson.

The ultimate failure of the Characters to live on stage is, analogously, the result of the second task of history that Heidegger identifies in his 1915 lecture—to establish the context of the facts determined by the first task ("Science of History" 70). Likewise, the second important goal of the theatre company in the play is to give context and structure to the Characters and their story. History, through the completion of the second task identified by Heidegger, gives meaning and significance to the facts at hand, interpreting them in relation to the circumstances from dentro di me; mentre chi le ascolta, inevitabilmente le assume col senso e col valore che hanno per sé, del mondo com’egli l’ha dentro? Crediamo d’intenderci; non c’intendiamo mai! (Sei personaggi 110).

38 Posso soltanto dire che, senza sapere d’averli punto cercati, mi trovai davanti, vivi da poterli toccare, vivi da poterne udire perfino il respiro, quei sei personaggi che ora si vedono sulla scena. E attendevano, li presenti, ciascuno col suo tormento segreto e tutti uniti dalla nascita e dal viluppo delle vicende reciproche, ch’io li facessi entrare nel mondo dell’arte, componendo delle loro persone, delle loro passioni e dei loro casi un romanzo, un dramma o almeno una novella.

Nati vivi, volevano vivere (Sei personaggi 4).
which they emerge. Later, this relational concept would appear as an essential quality of world/worldhood that would occupy a large part of Heidegger’s inquiry into the nature of being (and which will be addressed in the coming pages). For now, it is enough that the dual tasks of uncovering facts and properly contextualizing them that constitute the study of history pose an irredeemable challenge to the Characters’ goal, primarily because their creator withheld a proper context in which the story could unfold.

As a result of the two tasks Heidegger identifies, history therefore comes to represent a process of objectification ("Science of History" 68). Similarly, the living characters become objectified, reduced to the narrative, structural, and cultural norms that make the theatrical event intelligible; the actors receive their roles based on their position in the theatre company (The Father is intended to be portrayed by the leading man, the Stepdaughter by the Leading Lady, etc.) and the Characters become the object of study as they play a scene and are subsequently interpreted (poorly) by the Actors, a problem anticipated by the Stepdaughter:

**THE MANAGER: ** […] *(To the LEADING LADY)* You naturally are the Step-Daughter…  
**THE STEP-DAUGHTER:** *(excitedly).* What? what? I, that woman there? *(Bursts out laughing.)*  
**THE MANAGER:** *(angry).* What is there to laugh at?  
**LEADING LADY:** *(indignant).* Nobody has ever dared to laugh at me. I insist on being treated with respect; otherwise I go away.  
**THE MANAGER:** *(to STEP-DAUGHTER).* You ought to feel honored to be played by …  
**LEADING LADY:** *(at once, contemptuously).* “That woman there” …  
**THE STEP-DAUGHTER:** But I wasn’t speaking of you, you know. I was speaking of myself—whom I can’t see at all in you *(Six Characters 243-244).*

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39 **IL DIRETTORE:** … *(alla PRIMA ATTRICE)* lei, signorina, s’intende, la figliastra.  
**LA FIGLIASTRA:** *(esilarata)* Come come? Io, quella lì? *(Scoppierà a ridere.)*  
**IL DIRETTORE:** *(irato)* Che cos’ha da ridere?  
**LA PRIMA ATTRICE:** *(indignata)* Nessuno ha mai osato ridersi di me! Pretendo che mi si rispetti, o me ne vado!  
**LA FIGLIASTRA:** Ma no, scusi, io non rido di lei.  
**IL DIRETTORE:** *(alla FIGLIASTRA)* Dovrebbe sentirsi onorata d’esser rappresentata da…  
**LA PRIMA ATTRICE:** *(subito, con sdegno)* – «quella lì!».  
**LA FIGLIASTRA:** Ma non dicevo per lei, creda! dicevo per me, che non mi vedo affatto in lei, ecco… Non so, non… non m’assomiglia per nulla… *(Sei personaggi 127).*
and, confirmed by the Father, who, after having watched the beginning of the scene in Madame Pace’s shop, laments that it has become something, “that is theirs—and no longer ours” (meaning the Characters) (Pirandello Six Characters 257). In this moment, the Characters are othered by the work of the Actors and are something to be fixed in the conventions of the stage. Like the historian, who can only interpret the object of study across the distance of the temporal divide that separates the past facts from the present moment (Heidegger "Science of History" 68-69), the Actors can only attempt (and ultimately fail in their task) in the face of the epistemological and ontological distance that separates them from the experience of the Characters, previously cited in the outcry of the Mother at the sight of her daughter in Madame Pace’s shop and the Father’s assertion that this, and so many other instances of the story, take place in the ontologically inaccessible “eternal moment” (Pirandello Six Characters 260). In this way, any dramatic text or performance that the company endeavors to produce would stand not as the life the Characters seek on stage, but essentially as an historical document. It will be a record of the life they had, but it will not be life itself. The Characters face death in interpretation by the actors, as the Father argues with the Manager:

Well, if you want to take away from me the possibility of representing the torment of my spirit which never gives me peace, you will be suppressing me: that’s all. Every true man, sir, who is a little above the level of the beasts and plants does not live for the sake of living, without knowing how to live; but he lives so as to give a meaning and a value of his own to life. For me, this is everything. I cannot give this up, just to represent a mere fact as she [Indicating the Step-Daughter] wants. It’s all very well for her, since her “vendetta” lies in the “fact.” I’m not going to do it. It destroys my raison d’être (Pirandello Six Characters 269-270).41

40 *IL PADRE:* Una cosa, ecco…che diventa di loro; e non più nostra… (*Sei personaggi* 138).

41 *IL PADRE:* Eh, ma se mi togli di rappresentare il tormento del mio spirito che non si dà pace, lei mi sopprime, badi! Ogni vero uomo, signore, che sia un po’ più su delle pietre, delle piante, delle bestie, non vive per vivere, senza saper di vivere; ma per dare un suo senso e un suo valore. E per me è questo, il valor che le do. Non posso rinunziarvi, per rappresentare soltanto un <<fatto>>, come vorrebbe costei (*indica LA FIGLIASTRA*), perché nel <<fatto>> è la sua vendetta! Non posso e non debo: per quello che io sono (*Sei personaggi* 149).
How might time be considered not only in the role of history (as characterized by Heidegger) and in the Actor’s process of interpretation that stands as analogous to the study of history? It’s not an easy question to answer, since the goal of history is not the same as physics; time is not used to measure (at least not in the same way) and so does not take on the homogeneity that physics requires in its efforts. In 1915, Heidegger would recognize that “historical time cannot be expressed mathematically,” and that while historical time periods may follow one another in succession, each one is “distinct in its structural content” (Heidegger "Science of History" 71). The concept of time in history stands as qualitative, not quantitative, and represents the congealing—the crystallization—of an objectification of life within history” ("Science of History" 71).

But the questions of facticity, context, and structure are not the only obstacles to the Character’s pursuit, and the qualitative, contextualizing spirit that seems to propel the study of history in Heidegger’s early study would evolve into one of the most complex and fruitful considerations of his philosophy: that of worldhood, and ultimately what the world brings to bear on the concept of being. The “world” that Heidegger refers to is also more complex than what we might refer to colloquially and imprecisely as “the world.” World is one of the most important and dynamic concepts of Heidegger’s philosophy, and one that evolved considerably over the course of his career. In 1927’s Being and Time, Heidegger’s work on the constitution of world is oriented not simply to being at large, but primarily human being (Jones 84), which may appear at the outset to pose a significant problem to analyzing how the Six Characters are able (or not) to engage with the world as Heidegger characterizes it, but all is not lost. The pursuit of world or worldhood was not a new problem when Heidegger approached it, taking up the project in large part from his predecessor Husserl (64). The problem of what constitutes world and the
question of what might provide some kind of universal context seem to have been part of the projects of science and philosophy (64). But, for Heidegger, *world* is not a container for things and events, or at least, it is not simply that. Instead, *world* represents a “relational totality” (64), and as Edwin Jones notes, represents “the region for human possibilities; it is uncovered as existing by our capacity to be affected by it and structure according to our capacity to understand whatever may affect us, while our comportment within it expresses the implicit understanding we always have of its worldhood” (65).

*World* takes on four related meanings in *Being and Time* (67), which comprise two ontic-ontological pairs. Daniel O. Dahlstrom identifies these four distinctions as the following:

1. “the totality of entities on-hand within the world,
2. “the manner of being of entities on-hand within the world (or certain regions of such entities, e.g. the world of mathematics),
3. “the place in which, being-here (*da-seitend*), we factually live and dwell (e.g. the public world, a household),
4. “the manner of being proper to being-in-the-world” (Dahlstrom n. page; Location 4509)

Items 1 and 2 represent the first ontic-ontological pair, and items 3 and 4 the second pair, “ontic referring to the specific entity or entities that can be intended, and the accompanying description, investigations, or interpretations of those entities (Jones 67; Dahlstrom n. page; Location 2799 ). These ontic entities have their ontological counterpart in Heidegger’s consideration of being, particularly human being, for which the term *Dasein* would, broadly speaking, come to stand.

This ontology, with respect to *Dasein*, encompasses the being of those entities within the horizon of significance and structures of meaning through which the ontic is understood in relation to *world* (Jones 75).

The particular being that Heidegger chiefly attends to in his work is that of human being. Heidegger offers a conception of time that is oriented toward *Dasein* and resistant to the mechanisms of science which seek to measure and divide it into arbitrary units, as though it
could be a homogenous and distinct thing all its own (what we might refer to as “clock time” which had, by Heidegger's time had already received considerable attention in the work of Bergson). Instead, for Heidegger, events and change unfurl in time—change can only be evaluated in time, and time can only be attended to when we consider it in conjunction with the events that unfold within it.

Being, too, must be understood in conjunction with its temporal component. Heidegger, in adopting the term *Dasein*, suggests a way of being that is not limited to an understanding of an individual entity, but a network of conditions that make intelligibility possible. All told, the conditions for Being outlined above fall into categories of Thrownness, Projection, and Discourse, and together comprise a temporal unfolding across which *Dasein* is established not as an entity, but a “happening” (Guignon "Martin Heidegger" 318). Furthermore, the “being-in-the-world” Heidegger sees inherently at work in the happening that comprises *Dasein* is not simply an act of occupying a space. It is more of a “dwelling”—a belonging to and understanding of the world in which *Dasein* is thrust (Wheeler n. pag.). *Dasein*’s unfolding across time finds its completion in death, and *Dasein* can only understand itself in relation to and with an awareness of its eventual demise (Wheeler n. pag.). The authenticity that Heidegger prizes in his inquiry into Being can only be achieved in knowing that life ends.

So, what can this mean to the “being” with which the Characters were conceived and the being they hope to achieve on stage? The answer to that question lies largely in the Characters’ relationship to world (as understood in conjunction with *Dasein*) and in their particular status as rejected works of art (that is, without an appropriate narrative context in which their story might transpire). World and worldhood undergo significant evolution from Husserl to Heidegger. As noted above, *Dasein*’s authenticity is, in part, dependent upon a belonging to in the world through both self-interpretation and a shared understanding of the conventions that make up that
work, neither of which seems possible for the Character’s to achieve, since they require the work of the actors, the context of the drama, and the seemingly foreign conventions of the theatre (that engage both artists and audience) to be understood. Thus, the kind of human “being” that describes Dasein is presumably withheld from the Characters, but this is not the case. However, it is not a simple matter, requiring a different approach, one that Heidegger offers through his Characterization of the work of art.

The first version of the essay, “The Origin of the Work of Art” from 1935 gives some insight into how Heidegger thinks about the work of art, its origin, and its purpose. Heidegger takes a non-aesthetic approach to art and its creation, identifying the origin of the work of art as truth, not beauty, and attempting to reconfigure our understanding of art in way that is not limited to the duality of form and content (Petruzzi 51-52). Pirandello and Heidegger treat their subjects as having no interior life—they are instead “[sets] of historical practices which disclose the ‘being’ of [their] particular and contextual ‘there’” (52). For Heidegger in particular, the essence of art is the “setting-into-work-of-truth” ("Origin of the Work of Art" 144). Instead of the duality of form and content, truth and the work of art manifest in one another—they produce and speak to the shared cultural norms and understandings (Dreyfus 354). A work of art is the “expression of Being itself,” (Bossart 60) one that cannot be separated from life if it is to be comprehended (64).

Even though the work of art (in any form) is created within a specific time and place, it is not simply a representation of its historical context. Art and history have a dynamic relationship, and ways of Being are altered each time a new artwork is introduced into a culture (Dreyfus 353). Works of art, in short, help to create a sense of shared understanding within a culture (354). When Heidegger declares that true art breaks the world open, he means that art is an expression of Being (Bossart 60), and like Being, transcends its current situations and projects
into the future, but without losing sight of its context (66). Art animates and reanimates possibility, not simply reinforcing norms and mores, but shapes a society and the kinds of people who can be a part of it (Guignon "Martin Heidegger" 319). Thus, Heidegger’s adoption of the term *Dasein* is especially relevant with respect to the work of art, *Dasein* stands out against, but is never separated from, the historical conditions and conventions which give rise to it (Petruzzi 59), and refers to a kind of being rooted in and understood through the terms of its time and place of origin (53).

As a result, what is channeled by the artist is so much more than a typical understanding of the dichotomy of form and content. Pirandello’s own view of the origin of character shares a number of features that correspond to Heidegger’s view of the origin of art. The aesthetic principles which underscore Pirandello’s artistic output have a long history with respect to his drama, rooted as they are in the 1899 essay “Spoken Action” and its 1908 extension, “Illustrators, Actors, and Translators”. The first of these aesthetic statements speaks to the nature of dramatic dialogue on the realist stage. The fault that Pirandello sees at work in contemporary practice is that writers create characters to suit a given situation, writing:

> They have, or believe they have, a perspective on a given feeling or situation in life that they believe is original and which they can turn into a play, rather like a conclusion to be drawn from a process of reasoning. To this, they add external elements, carefully studying patterns of relationship, which they graft together and combine. Having thought of the *fact*, they set about devising the characters most suited to reinforce that fact ("Spoken Action" 21). 42

Instead of characters written to suit a particular message or motive, Pirandello asserts that art possesses a liveliness that cannot be forced to conform to the creator’s didactic intent, and that to

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42 Essi vedono in prima un dato fatto (quando lo vedono), una data situazione; hanno o credono di avere una certa osservazione che stimano originale su un dato sentimento o caso della vita, e pensano di trarne un dramma, come una conclusione costruita al pari d'un ragionamento, con un'addizione d'elementi esteriori, di cui studiano i rapporti, e innestano e combinano. Conceputo il fatto, pensano ai personaggi, cercano i più idonei a dimostrarlo … ("L'azione parlata" 448).
start the creative process with an abstract or philosophical idea and to write with the intent of demonstrating it, the outcome is “the death of art itself” ("Spoken Action" 21). The drama should not appear to be the product of one person’s intense and labored examination of a problem and told through puppets, but a confluence of people – “living, free, and active” ("Spoken Action" 21-22).

Pirandello extends the argument in the 1908 essay with “Illustrators, Actors, and Translators,” remarking that,

> All three are faced with a work of art that has already been set down, that is, has already been conceived and effected by someone else, and the first must translate it into another art form, the second must translate the material into action, the third into another language ("Illustrators..." 29).

The actor, according to Pirandello, reduces the liveliness of the character, making it “more real and yet less true than the character created by the writer, he takes away from him just so much ideal, superior truth as he gives back in ordinary, material reality, and so makes him less true because he is translating him into the fictitious, conventional reality of the stage” ("Illustrators..." 29). What results is something reduced and confined to spatial and temporal bounds which define the conventions of the theatre. There is no life outside of the narrative framework of the play, and the actor imbues the performance with the concrete, static meanings and feeling that he believes to be germane to the portrayal. What was once expansive and full of possibility has found an end in performance.

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43 “…è la morte stessa dell’arte” ("L’azione parlata" 449).

44 “E prima d’ogni altro duunque bisogna aver le persone: vive, libere, operanti” ("L’azione parlata" 449).

45 “Tutti e tre hanno davanti a sé un’opera d’arte già espressa, cioè già concepita ed eseguita da altri, che l’uno deve tradurre in un’altra arte; il secondo, in azione materiale; il terzo, in un’altra lingua” (Pirandello "Illustratori..." 646).

46 “Rende, cioè, più reale e tuttavia men vero il personaggio creato dal poeta, gli toglie tanto, cioè, di quella verità ideale, superiore, quanto più gli dà di quella realtà materiale, comune; e lo fa men vero anche perché lo traduce nella materialità fittizia e convenzionale della scena” ("Illustratori..." 647).
Anthony Petruzzi’s extensive analysis of *Six Characters* through the lens of Heidegger’s comments on art and art-making, notes that "[Six Characters in Search of an Author] destroys the duality of form and content by demonstrating the ‘primal conflict’ that occurs in the disclosure of truth" (52). The Characters seek a kind of completeness in a new context, projecting out of their own understanding and experience as “unfinished” into a new world (and genre): that of a play (65). If the characters are going to “be” in Heidegger’s sense, after being rejected by their original creator, they must be set into a work of art (65). Yet, even as they project into this finished state, the final product does not say very much about the Characters or the conditions of their creation and subsequent rejection; they are absorbed into a cultural framework, aesthetic conditions, and a set of norms and social practices which minimizes their experience (66), and so their endeavor fails.

Yet, there is another possibility that reanimates the Characters’ quest for being: that of the monument (61). Of course, when drawing upon the concept of the monument, one might ask to what does such a monument refer? As previously noted, in Heidegger’s analysis there is no set meaning and no objective hidden significance that can be discovered in Heidegger’s work of art. Instead, the truth that is set into the work of art is the preservation of the “primal conflict” between world and earth and between “incarnate thought” and its transformation into “embodied thought” (52). Meaning is precisely what the Six Characters resist, according to Petruzzi, who writes:

Pirandello's *Six Characters in Search of an Author* is what Heidegger calls a "monument"; its fixed or embodied nature is inscribed with the traces of the conflict that commemorates truth as it was set-into-a-work of art. This does not mean that the play contains a deep or buried truth that can be "discovered"; rather, its being, i.e. its meaning, creates the open place, the clearing, where its truth emerges. A work of art preserves that open place of emergence, which is independent from the subjectivity of either its maker or its audience (61).
If, as Petruzzi proposes, *Six Characters* is a monument to the primal conflict between earth and world like any other work of art that could fit Heidegger’s criteria, then it at once speaks to an open-ended quality of time and things, while simultaneously situating it on the earth and in space. The work of art is not simply an object to behold; rather, it is constituted by and also itself constitutes social practices and understandings that create a “world”, then the facticity of the work of art—its thrownness into the world and its existence upon the earth—must be accounted for. This is a potential stumbling block for this analysis. Do we contend with the text of the play or the theatrical interpretation and performance of that text? What here is the work of art?

At the risk of appearing to take the easy way out, I would suggest that, in spite of this being largely textual analysis, the solution to the question, though it is important, remains indeterminate. A play, generally speaking, is largely considered incomplete without performance, while a particular performance represents one possible outcome of a director or theatre company’s interpretation (Turner and Behrndt 35). In Petruzzi’s analysis, the “inner play” of the Six Characters (that is, the Characters’ individual realities juxtaposed with the lack of narrative context) is in conflict with the outer world of the actors which they confront (67-69). Yet Petruzzi offers a possible way of dealing with the indeterminacy (largely addressed in the chapter on *Six Characters*) writing that,

The expectation is that art endures as some radical subversion of mortality; however, time is not defeated in the sense that [the Characters] are created as subjectivities which are immortal. Rather, the drama is a work of art; therefore, the self-presentation can endure in time; the endurance is the abiding and preserving of the coming-to-presence, not the uncovering of some essential subjective experience or some object that can be calculated and objectified as the "truth" of a character (Petruzzi 71).
Thus, the text and performance, together, seem to be the thing that, in this case, suggests a monument, as each actor’s representation (be it of a character or a Character) can only amount to a “partial trace” of their roles’ truth.

6 Six Characters and Relativity

As noted, art stands out against, but is never separate from the world in which it originates. Pirandello’s world, in the early 20th-century, was undergoing a significant redefinition with the emergence of relativity theory. Relativity is a concept that permeates Pirandellian dramaturgy. The “relativity of perception” is a particular item that runs throughout Pirandello’s work of the twenties, but originates from the novels and short stories that preceded his career; Pirandello’s first theatrical foray into the subject emerged in 1917 with *Così è (se vi pare)*, itself based on the short story, *La signora Frola e il signor Ponza, suo genero* (Hallamore Caesar 77-78). These works are predicated upon the questions of how people see each other, see themselves, and ultimately, how they see themselves through the eyes of others; Pirandello’s characters are vulnerable to what is said about them by others; identity is fragile (75). In Ann Hallamore Caesar’s analysis of the relationship between the self and the other in Pirandello’s work, the social components of how individuals understand themselves and other people, primarily through gossip and conjecture, occupies a central position; Secrets and gossip—often motivated by sex—are just illustrations on philosophical themes; “[they] go to the very heart of how we try to live our lives which, in its turn, is pivotal in determining who we think we are and what we think we are like” and “the very capacity to have self-consciousness is therefore founded on otherness” (65; 76). The provincial and rural settings found in many Pirandello’s shorter works—particularly those set in Sicily—lend credence to the social component of self-consciousness, as the smaller, more insular communities “show repeatedly his fascination with
the mechanisms by which a community controls its own members” especially by way of gossip (68). The larger, urban locales of other works bestow anonymity upon Pirandello’s characters (66). The vulnerability that Pirandello’s characters’ experience when subjected to the whims and words of others is the outcome of the “othering” that happens with special frequency and viciousness in Pirandello’s Sicilian stories, or, so as to extend Hallamore Caesar’s assertions, even in those stories in which characters find themselves in the liminal space between urban and rural, such as in the short story, and later, one-act play *Lumie di Sicilia*. In this, and other works, characters are held to what they were in the past by gossip and social/interpersonal expectations and subsequently “destined to lives of endless self-repetition”, and are constantly historicized by others so that they can never live in the present themselves or “be lived” by others as Hallamore Caesar proposes (75). In *Lumie di Sicilia*, we see Micuccio, waiting in what is essentially a place of transit—a hallway or entryway of a large home in an otherwise unnamed northern Italian town (even the city itself is anonymized!). Having traveled from a town in Sicily, he expects to see Teresina, the innocent singer he discovered and intended to marry upon her success in a professional musical career. Instead, she has been changed considerably by her success, no longer the wholesome girl with whom he fell in love. In their final confrontation, in the hallway (the play takes place entirely in the hallway) Micuccio tries to hold Teresina to account, scolding her for how much she has changed and walking out for good. But, his provincial values have no hold over her, as she takes the *lumie*\(^{47}\) he had brought as a gift into the dining room, where her many male admirers, unaware of what has transpired just over the threshold, are given the opportunity to enjoy the fruit. In the hallway, where urban and rural meet, literally in Teresina and Micuccio, they are unable to imagine each other with depth and complexity, bringing the

\(^{47}\) A breed of lemon cultivated in Southern Italy and Sicily.
values of their respective homes to bear on the encounter and recognizing the other as out of place in their opposite setting.

With respect to the Six Characters, this vulnerability to the words and ideas of others takes a new dimension with respect to time and the aforementioned relativity of perception. Like Micuccio and Teresina, characters would likely fail to thrive in settings (or even more broadly, genres) that are not their own (62). Furthermore, we see how the attempts to historicize the characters (first amongst themselves as the Father and Step Daughter argue over the nature of the drama) and then by the company as they attempt to give the drama shape continually with the other the Characters and make it impossible for them to live as they intend. This problem of historicization is first prominently raised in a passage already identified, that in which the company tries to stage the scene in Madame Pace’s shop. The Director, trying to subdue The Mother’s distress at witnessing her daughter in the embrace of the Father, asks what is so wrong, since the event has already happened, to which she replies that it is always happening (Six Characters 260) Thus, Pirandello presents to us characters and events that resist historicization.

But what does this have to do with the relativistic problems of perception and understanding that preclude the company’s play from ever moving beyond the experiment with which the Characters tempt the director? Time certainly isn’t the only thing separating the experience of the Characters with that of the Actors, but it is necessary to center the concept, especially with respect to the construction of personal history and identity. The Father notes that in the world of the actors, reality can change from day to day, but not so for the Characters—personal history and present torment are not only one and the same for the characters, they are fixed and unchanging as well. The Characters relate the events that happen before the action of the story (suggesting that those happening should not be staged), but even with the knowledge of the events that led the family to their downfall (as literary characters first, to say nothing of their
failure as dramatic figures—though, we’ll get there) there is no escape from their circumstances or the course of events that comprise the story.

Relativism stands as an enormous topic, both in general and in Pirandellian dramaturgy in particular. From the scientific perspective advanced by Einstein, the idea that time is uniform is dispensed with in favor of the possibility that the passage of time might be relative to an observer—a second is not simply a second (Lightman 60). As such, relativity is a theory not only of time, but also (and inextricably) of space (69). When we observe the movement of bodies through space, we ascertain their position with regards to the frame of reference against which they move; in judging and measuring the time of such an event, we are really judging and measuring simultaneity (64). However, such an evaluation of events bears no absolute significance, and there is no cosmic frame of reference against which to judge movement (Einstein "Electrodynamics" 76).

In examining the Characters and Pirandello’s brand of relativism, a purely scientific account will not do. Instead, this analysis will speak to the aesthetic consequences of relativism and the ways in which it begins to manifest in Pirandello’s *Six Characters*. The first problem is obvious, as perhaps the structure and progression of the chapter this point has demonstrated—no one person or method is perfectly matched to the task of approaching characters as Pirandello imagines them in 1899, 1908, and 1921/25, that is as living entities. When we read the text of *Six Characters*, we access the characters through the words Pirandello has ultimately chosen to represent them. Watching the play in performance, we receive the characters through the work of the actor, director, and creative teams that shaped the project (to say nothing of the status of the characters as initially rejected from a novel and the quasi-ekphrastic exercise of reimagining them for the stage). The closest direct access to these figures was probably held by Pirandello
himself, who, anecdotally, would often be seen “talking” with his characters while alone in his study, to the confusion and concern of others (Hallamore Caesar 1-2).

Without an object or movement to properly observe, this analysis must therefore direct its energies to the play (perhaps as a remainder or trace of the moment of creation in Pirandello’s practice) as an aesthetic consequence of the emergence of relativity. The verist fiction and drama to which Pirandello was responding in his work proves antithetical to the work of relativism. 19th-century realism was largely predicated on the idea of “authorial mediation” in which the authoritative creative figure, be it author or painter, works from a fixed point of view, thus maintaining a dualist perspective on the world, which is itself given order and meaning by a deity or organizing force (Craig 31-32):

The authorial mediation itself generates a complex aesthetic structure dependent on the notion of a single transcendent deity. Since the dualist author perceives a constant significance in the events and persons he is representing, he can arrange events and describe characters in such a way as to communicate an idea that transcends the sequence of events (32).

Relativism, and the modern consciousness derived from it does away with the moralizing component of dualism, which is precisely the predicament the Characters face in trying to determine the nature of their story (e.g. revenge v. redemption). Furthermore, this returns us to the resistance to historicization that the Characters demonstrate; reality and history are not objective or external, but are created and shaped by our discourse and through our interpretations (18-19).

As such, the actions of the Characters are not judged in relation to just one omnipotent force (be it God, social customs, or morality) but also in relation to one another, which further complicates the pursuit of a particular genre of narrative, and against the backdrop of contemporary theatre practices. It also calls attention to the role of consciousness and self-consciousness (already touched upon), and the way in which individuals construct their personal
identity (and how that identity stands in relation to the constructed realities that comingle as individuals interact with each other. This marks Pirandello as one of the most significant thinkers (not to mention artists) of the early 20th-century. As Anthony Caputi notes,

...Pirandello was a key figure in that shift of sensibility by which the consciousness with its many-layered life replaced the inherited structures of tradition in the West as a matrix of value […] But Pirandello has a special importance because he developed a vision of modern man in which consciousness as he understood it became the central issue in a new philosophy of behavior (Caputi 1).

As previously mentioned, reality for the actors in the theatre company is fluid and constantly changing; for the Characters, it is precisely the opposite, as the events of their story are already fixed and playing out eternally and all at once. Einstein’s work on relativity offers up some basic rules which a properly functioning universe obeys (Calder's introduction to Einstein Relativity vii). However, in this consideration, space and time are intertwined into the continuum “spacetime,” rather than the Euclidean model of three spatial dimensions—X, Y, and Z—and time as the fourth dimension (Belot 186-187). By combining space and time into one continuum, science is better able to account for how velocity and gravitation affect the motion of an object; thus, relativity can dispense with the absolute significance time holds in the theories of physics that predate Einstein.

Still, physics is at its heart concerned with the motion of an object through space and time. And this is where the utility of relativity theory in understanding Pirandello’s work truly begins to reveal itself. Characters (especially the Six under scrutiny) are not physical, moving bodies in the typical sense. It is not that the Characters don’t occupy some kind of space

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48 A more literary treatment of the relationship between space and time is offered to us by Bakhtin’s application of the previously mentioned “chronotope” (“time-space”). This is a fluid term, but it speaks broadly to the conception and representation of time and space (Dentith 50). Like, spacetime, the chronotope resists treating space and time separately and instead demands the acknowledgment of their “intrinsic connectedness” (Pier n. pag.).
though, that is perhaps a distinct theoretical problem too big to address, starting all the way back to Plato’s thoughts on the nature of reality, ideal, and forms), but the way they relate their experience to time. The Characters wish to portray their story with all the complexity and nuance it has; being the “real life” of the character, the degree of detail and feeling that the Characters see at work in their story is infinitesimal. But the stage is not infinite, and so must reduce that story to the confines of the stage. The Characters wish to stage every excruciating detail; every moment is significant, down to the flowers on the wallpaper.

Again, the breakdown in understanding and the conflicting relativistic understandings of reality come into view only when the Characters story moves out of realm of character into that of human (and human endeavors, like theatre). In short, when the Characters begin to inhabit and move through spacetime, their ontological status is compromised. However, while it is clear that the Characters do not experience time and space in a conventional manner, it is difficult to establish if and how they occupy space and time and populate moments at all. Pirandello notes the problematic and mysterious nature of a character’s birth in the mind of its creator in the 1925 preface to Sei Personaggi, writing about how, with little effort, he found the characters before him, alive, mutually entangled, and wishing to have their story told ("Preface to Six Characters" 364).

49 That is to say that for Pirandello’s Characters and the early aesthetic statements they reinforce, the stage is a reduction of possibilities for the story they wish to tell. The actual performance space and what it represents is a bit more complex. As Karel Brušák suggests with the concept of Imaginary Action Space, the performance space can expand beyond what is visible on stage (e.g., we can imagine a forest extending from the playing space into the wings, or a messenger may relate events that have transpired out of sight or at a considerable distance (147-149). In addition, Manfred Pfister notes the complex relationship between the reality and fictionality of stage, citing the example of Six Characters; the real stage on which a performance of Six Characters occurs is overlaid with the fictional stage where the company rehearses a play (Pfister 247).

50 Quale autore potrà mai dire come e perché un personaggio gli sia nato nella fantasia? Il mistero della creazione artistica è il mistero stesso della nascita naturale. Può una donna, amando, desiderare di diventar madre; ma il desiderio da solo, per intenso che sia, non può bastare. Un bel giorno ella si troverà a esser madre, senza un preciso avvertimento di quando sia stato. Così un artista, vivendo, accoglie in sé tanti germi della vita, e non può mai dire
So, it is clear that, at least at the moment of origin, a scientific perspective does little to give insight into the nature of character and how time functions in the world of character. Furthermore, lest one thinks that a purely scientific perspective remains the answer, Caputi cautions that, for Pirandello, science could provide, at best “organized barbarism” to a world that is fundamentally and irredeemably in disarray (Caputi 1). Yet, while it is difficult to deduce if and how the realm from which the Characters originate bears a relationship between space and time that the “real world” offers, it is clear that the Characters are not equipped for the spatial and temporal constraints of the real world’s artistic pursuits. Additionally, while faced with living characters ("Preface to Six Characters" 364) it is clear from Pirandello’s preface that these figures were never intended to inhabit the real world by way of the vehicle of narrative:

"Why not," I said to myself, "present this highly strange fact of an author who refuses to let some of his characters live though they have been born in his fantasy, and the fact that these characters, having by now life in their veins, do not resign themselves to remaining excluded from the world of art? They are detached from me; live on their own; have acquired voice and movement; have by themselves - in this struggle for existence that they have had to wage with me - become dramatic characters, characters that can move and talk on their own initiative; already see themselves as such; have learned to defend themselves against me; will even know how to defend themselves against others. And so let them go where dramatic characters do go to have life: on a stage. And let us see what will happen." [...] That's what I did. And, naturally, the result was what it had to be: a mixture of tragic and comic, fantastic and realistic, in a humorous situation that was quite new and infinitely complex, a drama which is conveyed by means of the characters, who carry it within them and suffer it, a drama, breathing, speaking, self-propelled, which seeks at all costs to find the means of its own presentation; and the comedy of the vain attempt at an improvised realization of the drama on stage51 ("Preface to Six Characters" 366).

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51 O perché mi dissi non rappresento questo novissimo caso d'un autore che si rifiuta di far vivere alcuni suoi personaggi, nati vivi nella sua fantasia, e il caso di questi personaggi che, avendo ormai infusa in loro la vita, non si
The origin of these dramatic Characters in their rejection by their author at once propels them (by sheer force of their own collective will) towards the theatre and the potential it holds to realize their goal, and concurrently withholds the realization in a dramatic narrative and performance that they seek, because the author has not taken the steps to bestow the significance and order upon the events of the narrative that their domestic drama would require.

Thus far, the analysis of Pirandello’s relativism has only considered spacetime in the most perfunctory way—as Minkowski’s proposal (adopted by Einstein) of a four-dimensional place in which space and time are contained (Tegmark n.pag). The conventional perspective of physics instead views space as a three-dimensional place in which change is observed over time (Tegmark n.pag). Change is not considered in the same way in Minkowski’s spacetime and relativity theory as it is in earlier interpretations of the relationship between space and time, in large part because time is inextricably bound up in space. Moving forward, we begin to see the challenges and consequences that four-dimensional spacetime poses for Einstein’s special relativity, and by extension the question of what it means to exist within such a construct (in both the scientific understanding of relativity, and the aesthetic metaphorical consequences which arise from an evolving understanding of what constitutes reality.

First, in a scientific regard, special relativity begins to demonstrate the effects of the entanglement of time and space in Minkowski spacetime. Einstein sets up his theory of special

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rassennano a restare esclusi dal mondo dell’arte? Essi si sono già staccati da me; vivono per conto loro; hanno acquistato voce e movimento; sono dunque già divenuti di per se stessi, in questa lotta che han dovuto sostenere con me per la loro vita, personaggi drammatici, personaggi che possono da soli muoversi e parlare; vedono già se stessi come tali; hanno imparato a difendersi da me; sapranno ancora difendersi dagli altri. E allora, ecco, lasciamoli andare dove son soliti d’andare i personaggi drammatici per aver vita: su un palcoscenico. E stiamo a vedere che cosa ne avverrà. Così ho fatto. Ed è avvenuto naturalmente quel che doveva avvenire: un misto di tragico e di comico, di fantastico e di realistico, in una situazione umoristica affatto nuova e quanto mai complessa; un dramma che da sé per mezzo dei suoi personaggi, spiranti parlanti semoventi, che lo portano e lo soffrono in loro stessi, vuole a ogni costo trovare il modo d'essere rappresentato; e la commedia del vano tentativo di questa realizzazione scenica improvvisa (Sei personaggi 6-7).
relativity first by identifying the limits of the terms of Euclidean geometry. He writes (almost laments!)

Every description of events in space involves the use of a rigid body to which such events have been referred. The resulting relationship takes for granted that the laws of Euclidean geometry hold for “distances,” the “distance” being represented physically by means of the convention of two marks on a rigid body (Einstein Relativity 12).

Elaborating on the constraints of Euclidean geometry, Einstein proposes a remedy to the ambiguity of terms like “position” and “space” (the meanings of which are not always clear), offering up as an alternative the terms “body of reference” and “system of co-ordinates” (Relativity 13). This is a significant shift in that Einstein’s characterization of the event being observed centers the observer as well.

By way of an illustration, Einstein ponders what happens when a stone is dropped off of a uniformly moving train carriage. What does a person on the ground watching see as the train passed and the stone fell (Relativity 13)? Rather than propose one possible outcome (the stone either transcribes a parabola or a straight line), Einstein determines that resulting observation depends on the position of the observer, writing, “the stone traverses a straight line relative to a system of co-ordinates rigidly attached to the carriage, but relative to a system of co-ordinates rigidly attached to the ground (embankment) it describes a parabola” (Relativity 13). Even before moving on to the position of time within relativity theory, it is already becoming clear how a more metaphorical treatment of observer position plays out in Six Characters. In Einstein’s theory, there is a duality of object and referent; motion is always observed in relation to a body or frame of reference that does not move (Relativity 13).

In Pirandello, this is interesting because the referential frame, while unchanging with respect to individual characters, is destabilized when considering the dramatic work as a whole. This does not only have significance in Six Characters, in which we are presented with the
duality of Character and Actor, or that of the events in a story and the play which structure those events, but later plays, such as *Enrico IV* where madness is juxtaposed with sanity, youth is compared with age, and personal history is set in relief against the shared or official history of a community (though, even shared history can be faulty).

Furthermore, as time becomes intertwined in relativity, the concept of simultaneity briefly introduced in the preceding pages takes on a special significance. For Einstein, all physical observations and statements in which time plays a role face the “problem” of simultaneity in which the bodies under scrutiny changed position in relation to a frame of reference (*Relativity* 23). For the Characters to see their story staged successfully—that is, transmogrified into an object or event that can occupy and move through spacetime—they must be able to understand the nature of simultaneity; the ability to observe and evaluate it is seemingly predicated this.

Einstein offers yet another train-based example to illustrate the concept of simultaneity. He imagines what someone would observe if two bolts of lightning, in the same instant, struck two telephone poles as a train passed between them. For someone observing the train as it passes from a stationary position on the ground between the poles, it would seem as if the bolts of would flash simultaneously, since light travels at the same speed in all directions, and this observer is standing at the exact midpoint between the poles (Belot 186; Einstein *Relativity* 26-28). But, for someone sitting atop the train, the bolt of light coming from the strike in the direction of travel would appear ever so slightly before the lighting flash from which the train is moving away.

At first glance, it seems this consideration of simultaneity gets us closer to the Characters’ predicament. But, if we simply consider the resulting observations (one in which the two lightning bolts appear to flash at the same time, another in which one bolt appears to flash
before the other) we begin to see how the individual position (physical or metaphorical) in relation to an event might affect one’s conclusions about the nature of that event. The problem of simultaneity, and more specifically, the question of what events or objects are being included in an observation preclude any possibility for discovering any absolute significance. The aforementioned observers in Einstein’s lightning bolt thought experiment are both correct in their assessment of the situation; their observations are equally valid—it is their position in relation to the event which makes all the difference. Simultaneity, and in a broader regard relativity, do not only consider how the events under observation transpire in relation to one another, but also the place of the observer herself. The recorded results are predicated upon the co-presence of the observer.

This is precisely the problem that the Characters face, not only in agreeing on the facts of their own story, but also on the efficacy of the work of the theatre (and its creators) in realizing that story. The tools and methods by which the company tries to accommodate the Characters (e.g., acquiring set pieces and props; acting the parts in a way commensurate with the way leading actors conduct themselves within the company and onstage—even if the stage directions and the playwright’s own misgivings about the theatre in his aesthetic statements perhaps let slip Pirandello’s faith in the ontological superiority of the Characters) may seem reasonable to the Actors themselves and even familiar to the audience of Pirandello’s day. Yet, the Characters, looking on, and intruding upon a world that they do not understand and for which they were never intended are only incredulous and obstructionist. The event at the center of this dispute—the attempt of the company to stage a scene—possesses no absolute significance; it stands as both a reasonable attempt and an utter failure, depending on the perspectives of those who have a stake in evaluating the effectiveness of the attempt.
Moreover, the broader generic and stylistic concerns of the story the Characters wish to tell suggest something along the lines of the naturalist narratives of the late 19th-century (though with a suggestion of the melodramatic). As previously noted, Pirandello had already in 1899’s “Spoken Action” made clear his disdain for the writers who compose characters and situations to fit a moral or social message. While scientific foundations and claims of social efficacy advanced by the realist and naturalist movements were largely absent from teatro verismo, it is important to note that verismo did not evolve in a vacuum. It does adhere to at least some of the naturalist principles that distinguish Zola’s work, displaying,

the regional character and inherent pessimism of the stories; the blind passion of the protagonists; a quasi-scientific and detached approach to describing both the social, cultural, and political climate in which the characters function and their psychological thought processes; and the importance of a language appropriate to the social and geographical situation of the characters […] Literary verismo thus focuses on the logical and tragic developments of the protagonists’ character as a consequence of the “fateful, endless and often wearisome and agitated path trod by humanity to achieve progress, which leaves the weak by the wayside (Giger 272-273).

Even without the explicit message directed by, but also toward, the social and scientific principles of the 19th-century (e.g., the actions and circumstances that make the world especially difficult for characters like Hedda Gabler or Miss Julie, and the means by which they ultimately make their exits from their respective worlds), Pirandello nonetheless takes aim at these kinds of narratives, writing as though the consequences which befall the characters could not have any other meaning or could not transpire in any other way. Within the nuances of the realist movement, what is necessary is a social, economic, or political framework against which the actions of the characters are read as right or wrong, just or unjust, and ultimately in keeping with or violating the expectations of the world they inhabit. Not only do the characters lack the structuring devices that give order to the story itself; they have been abandoned by their author without a sense of what larger meaning that story might have to those who encounter it.
In his work on the electrodynamics of moving bodies, Einstein rendered the ether (the medium through which it was believed light traveled) as superfluous (it was ultimately proven nonexistent) (Einstein "Electrodynamics" 73). Instead, his theory of special relativity demonstrated that, without a cosmic frame of rest (that is, the superfluous ether) we can only evaluate the velocity and direction of objects in relation to one another, and that this observation is predicated upon the co-presence of observer, object, and event (Einstein Relativity 23; Lightman 63). As we have seen, the transition attempted by the Characters into the realm of four-dimensional spacetime fails, because they resist the unidirectional flow of time that would give a linear plot to the ongoing story that they bear with them, one that would designate change not only across the time of the performance as the story advances, but also their very nature as atemporal.

7 More Thoughts on Metatheatre

This chapter has gone to considerable lengths to distance Pirandello from the assumptions inherent in the term “metatheatre.” The concerns raised in the preceding section about how the rise of relativity contributes to the world into which the Characters intrude seem to undercut this attempt to necessitate such a distance—an opposition related in no small part due to Pirandello’s conception and treatment of the Characters as already rejected.

In spite of the difficulty that the ontological status of the Characters as rejected present to the nature of metatheatre, I would suggest that Six Characters still does not meet the requirements as outlined by Abel. At its heart, metatheatre denotes that the events and characters found within it are undeniable products of the playwright’s imagination, and do not necessarily have a referent in the real world that can be observed and adapted to the stage (Abel 59).
Additionally, Abel’s definition of metatheatre relies, in part, on a failure to write tragedy (113). So, where does Pirandello’s play reside in relation to the conditions of metatheatre?

As Pirandello’s *Six Characters* offers a generally unsatisfying resolution, it seems as though the answer to this question will be equally uncertain. At once, we are presented with figures and a location that have real-world referents (The Actors; the theatre in which the play takes place) and dramatic figures that, while they have analogs in domestic life, originate unquestionably in the realm of imagination. The drama emerges from the conflict of these entities. Furthermore, in conceiving of the Characters as rejected—as failed—we do not witness so much a failure to create tragedy that is the marker of metatheatre as much as we do a true demonstration of the Characters peculiar ontological status. If anything, the Characters’ predicament and the pursuit of the stage that arises from it is closer to tragedy than it is to metatheatre: The Characters fail to grasp the order imposed by man that Abel identifies as implicit in the project of metatheatre (113) and further validate their inescapable fate as rejected, bestowed upon them by their author and his refusal to write them. They are, as Abel describes tragedy, a dream of the real—products of a process with which a playwright chose to engage, but does not see to a suitable end.

8 Moving Forward

*Six Characters in Search of an Author* proves to be a rich, if incomplete, introduction into the dramaturgy of time in Pirandello’s work. Starting with a digression on the terminology chosen to refer to *Six Characters* and the plays with which it shares a number of features, I’ve explained why the concept of metatheatre does not do enough to grasp the scope of Pirandello’s theatre plays, instead suggesting how humor may allow more suitable aesthetic framework. Following this, the complication that embodiment brings to the Characters was discussed
through the work of Bergson. Husserl’s work on internal time consciousness offers a useful method of describing the flow of time in human consciousness and an important counterpoint to the atemporal consciousness the Characters bring to the work. Heidegger’s comments on the role time in historiography, the nature of time and the origin of the work of art show what historical context brings to bear on understanding a piece of art, and through this we are able to see how the social dimension of art is crucial to its reception and intelligibility. Then, relativity theory speaks to the complex nature of spacetime, and seems to reiterate how the theoretical questions might be manifest in the physical world. Finally, we return to the complicated nature of metatheatre, and reaffirm Pirandello’s resistance to such an aesthetically and theoretically broad concept.

Even though this text offers in itself a fecundating matrix for developing a methodology for treating Pirandello’s dramaturgy of time, it possesses a juvenile quality, posing more questions about the efficacy of the theatre and the nature of reality than it cares to answer. However, the following chapter will demonstrate Pirandello’s considerable growth from *Six Characters*, his first major international success, to the play that would immediately follow it—*Henry IV*. Using some of the same techniques, we’ll see how Pirandello’s initial exploration into the concept and portrayal of character has much to say about the human condition, and what role time has to play in it.
Chapter 3
Temporality and the Life/Form Dichotomy in *Henry IV*

Using the model offered by *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, this chapter will continue to show how time frames Pirandello’s understanding of the nature of reality, mapping the model offered by the Six Characters onto the ostensibly human entities represented in *Henry IV*. As with my treatment of *Six Characters* in the preceding chapter, I will consider *Henry IV* contends with the four theorists whose ideas of time, temporality, and being were circulating around the time Pirandello was writing.

The chapter will proceed as follows: It will first consider the place of this play in Pirandello’s theoretical and aesthetic development. It will then briefly revisit Pirandello’s concept of *l’umorismo*, explicitly addressing how it parallels Bergson’s theory comic in *Henry IV*. Following this, the problem of embodiment introduced in *Six Characters* analyzed through Bergson’s comments on the nature of Freedom and *Durée* in the preceding chapter will be augmented by a discussion of the role of memory in the protagonist’s pursuit of freedom. Following this, Husserl’s examination of the phenomenology of time consciousness (and the means by which we are able to understand the structures time consciousness) will (along with Bergson) lend weight to the ontological questions raised by the play.

Moving forward from this foundational understanding of how Henry places himself within the flow of time brings the question of continuity to the fore. Because of the obviously theatrical construction that characterize Henry's life (as discussed in a brief survey of Jill L. Levenson’s and Matthew N. Proser's remarks,) this second point draws issues of artistic creation,
theatricality, and performance into focus, which is especially evident when looking at Henry through the lens of Heidegger’s comments on art and art-making.\footnote{While \textit{Henry IV} remains one of Pirandello’s best-known plays, it was not his only work to deal with madness, identity and fragmentation (one might look to \textit{It is so (If you think so)} or the novel \textit{One, No One and One Hundred Thousand}). In addition, notable dramas after Pirandello incorporate madness, illness, and frailty as significant plot devices. \textit{The Physicists} (1961) by Friedrich Dürrenmatt, like \textit{Henry IV} features characters feigning madness, who then elect to “remain mad” to preserve their freedom, but are instead sentenced to live the remainder of their lives in confinement when their secret is found out. The inmates of the asylum at Charenton in Peter Weiss’ \textit{Marat/Sade} (1964) put on a play under the direction of the Marquis de Sade. While the clinic director implores de Sade to keep his company in line, the inmates—with their various ailments and idiosyncrasies—undermine the production with their own observations, interspersed with philosophical debates between de Sade and the clinic director on the nature of justice, power, and righteousness.}

Einstein’s theory of special relativity will again round out this chapter by speaking to larger paradigm shift at the turn of the 20th century in which an absolute sense of right and wrong is replaced by a shifting, decentered universe in which a person sees him- or herself at the center. The remarks of Betty Jean Craige will also serve well here, as she considers the philosophical and ontological concerns ramifications of a relativistic universe presented to us by scientific discovery at the turn of the 20th century. As will become clear, we are, each of us, at the center of our own story, and it is exceedingly difficult to alter this point of view. As a result, there is no absolute truth at the heart of reality. What exists instead is a multiplicity of experience in which events play out differently depending on the observer’s vantage point. Henry’s story speaks to this in a profoundly important way in the context of Pirandellian drama.

1 Some Remarks about this Selection

In \textit{Six Characters in Search of an Author}, this understanding of human experience is best expressed when juxtaposed with the unchanging reality of the Characters, who claim to be more real than the human members of the acting troupe. As noted in the preceding chapter, the Manager balks at the idea that the Characters possess a reality superior to that of the acting troupe, because, unlike human reality, the world and experiences of the Characters are not
subject to change (Six Characters 266). The Characters remain intact by refusing the efforts of the company to make their story fit into a narrative with a clear, moralizing message and logical trajectory. There is not a story here – there are multiple stories, each with a center at which one of the Characters sees himself or herself positioned. The Stepfather and the Daughter are perhaps the most fleshed out here, as Pirandello notes in his preface to the play ("Preface to Six Characters" 367) but each of his characters try to fulfill the requirement laid out in “Spoken Action” ("Spoken Action" 21).\(^{53}\) Pirandello’s emphasis on free, living and active people remains at the center of Henry IV, and this second play extends the questions and problems of Six Characters to characters who represent not timeless, uncontextualized fictional characters, but people with their own streams of consciousness and personal histories (which the audience encounters in media res), and ways of presenting/representing themselves to others. In short, Henry IV shows how the work of representation is not confined to the theatre.

The reasons for selecting Henry IV as the second play of this study, rather than Each in His Own Way were discussed in the introductory remarks of this thesis. However, the breakdown of intelligibility with respect to the protagonist’s story leads to a necessary disclaimer before continuing the analysis: The purpose of this chapter is not to diagnose Henry, since that would be an exercise in futility. In any case, the identification and treatment of mental illness is not, in the opinion of the author, a particularly compelling position to take with the play. Instead, it is more interesting and useful to consider how the protagonist uses his particular brand of madness (and the portrayal of that madness) to take control of the world around him. Additionally, the naming of the character is problematic, since Pirandello provides only the name of the historical emperor for the protagonist, not the actual name of the young man who would

\(^{53}\) E prima d’ogni altro dunque bisogna aver le persone: vive, libere, operanti ("L’azione parlata" 449).
come to adopt the role. I have tried to separate the two by referring to the figure in the play as “Henry” or “the protagonist” reserving the title “Henry IV” for the historical figure. Where the text from Pirandello’s play has been reproduced, I have maintained the playwright’s choices – he refers to his character/emperor consistently as Henry IV.

*Henry IV* premiered at the Teatro Manzoni in Rome on February 24th, 1922, just a few months after *Six Characters* (Bassnett and Lorch 72). Pirandello’s fascination with the failure of mutual understanding may be a significant theme of *Six Characters*, but in *Henry IV*, Pirandello shows us how fragile and illusory that co-constructed reality can be. Even within the individual, there is something that is unsustainable, as new understandings and experiences force the evolution of a person’s sense of themselves and their place in the world. In *Henry IV*, the epistemological impasse between the Characters and acting troupe is distilled into one figure that stands for both character and actor. Though it does not explicitly partake of the theatre-in-theatre model of other two texts under scrutiny in this analysis, *Henry IV* does not dispense with issues of theatricality and performance. It only demonstrates how those issues may be closer to everyday experience than it might be comfortable to admit. Specifically, the way in which Henry tries to manipulate his world draws many comparisons to Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*. As Jill Levenson argues, *Henry IV* follows, in part, in the tradition of *Hamlet’s* inner play, “The Murder of Gonzaga,” which is intended by the protagonist as a trap for Claudius and his accomplices (331). In Shakespeare’s play, the process of playmaking reflects on the product that is the play (331); the worlds of play and the outer world of Denmark’s royal court that frame it remain separate and distinct (citing Paolucci, 331). In this way, *Hamlet* emerges as a touchstone for the meta-theatrical (the promise and problems of which have been discussed in the preceding

chapter), with “[showing] life as consciously theatricalized, with characters aware of their own dramatic dimension” (Carlson 450) and a world which is a “projection of human consciousness” (Abel, in Carlson 450).

Though this analysis will not try to further problematize metatheatricality at present, _Henry IV_’s extended commentary on the nature of identity building (and the fluid and dynamic change that separate characters from actors and madmen—à la Henry—from sane people), it is nonetheless important to appreciate the performative, co-created reality that Henry’s visitors (as stand-ins for the reader/audience) seem to take for granted. Unlike _Hamlet, Henry IV_ partakes of a world in which “‘the various planes of action dissolve,’ and the world created makes no distinction between the illusory and the real. Instead of comparing two unlike things, Pirandello’s metaphor reveals them identical” (Levenson, citing Paolucci, 333). Even if the play opens with illusion, it reveals the mechanisms of that illusion—a mechanism rooted in the past and in the faulty memory of the protagonist and perpetuated by the group which has imposed itself upon the refuge for that feigned madness. As Levenson notes, even the visitors are not sure to whom they should attribute the idea of the costume cavalcade in which Henry was injured (334), and Henry himself was already in the process of creating his illusion (in effect, a historical drama) before he even had the capacity to understand what he was doing, establishing a world without being capable of making memories or conscious decisions:

With the narration from Henry's point of view, the audience receives a complex impression of the fantasy's evolution: it began with the conscious assumption of a role in someone else's pageant; but the full-scale "history play" was an unconscious creation, intuited, acted out before it was planned or understood" (334)

Henry’s choice to maintain the illusion of insanity recalls that self-consciousness of Abel’s metatheatre, in which order is improvised rather than dictated by an outside force (Carlson 450). But, ultimately, it resists the term and the baggage it carries with it, collapsing the
performance and the world which frames it into one another and demonstrating how the process of creation and the product that emerges from it are one and the same.

As Matthew Proser writes (at the same time as Levenson), both Hamlet and Henry IV “illuminate their actions with a play metaphor that forms a kind of perceptual lens through which we may study and come to understand the conduct of the characters and their tragic predicaments” (339). Proser deftly illustrates that both Shakespeare's and Pirandello's protagonists emerge from markedly different worlds (350). The social and political efficacy that characterizes Hamlet's revenge tragedy is undermined in Henry IV by an inward-looking, inactive retreat from reality that was the basis for the twelve years of affected madness (Henry IV 202). The metaphor of dramatic action and play are thus positioned with greater complexity and nuance in Henry IV and that nuance is essential to understanding how time is considered by Pirandello dramaturgically.

As Mark Currie notes, "Time is a feature of all narrative, but the subject of only a few" (Currie 2). In this regard, Proser’s analysis offers a good point of entry into understanding the ontological shift that Henry's consciousness represents, but is fundamentally flawed in its treatment of time. Proser suggests that time “is simply another enemy who seeks to strip away his mask” like the visitors attempting to cure him (345). But even if, as Proser proposes, Henry's predicament represents a madness that, at its very heart, is willful (even in the initial stages), then time, particularly the time lost between the experiences of sanity interrupted by extended madness, offers a promising means of access into the world of Pirandello's Henry. Here is where Bergson and Husserl work serve a foundational purpose. Not that we can’t read Henry IV in ways that highlight the theories each one put forth individually, but both theorists propose ways we understand the flow of time and place ourselves (physically and mentally) within it. Henry stands as human being, actor, and dramatic character, and the work of Bergson and Husserl lend
themselves to establishing how he tries to reconcile different experiences of time’s passage within himself.

2 Bergson’s Comic and Pirandello’s Humor

At this point it would be prudent to return momentarily to Pirandello’s humor. The protagonist of *Henry IV* recalls the image of the Old Woman in *L’umorismo*, made up as he is with his forelocks dyed a youthful blond and the dabs of rouge on his cheeks in an attempt to resemble the portrait of himself as a young man (Pirandello *Henry IV* 166). By way of the 1920 revision, Pirandello offers an important distinction between his definition of humor and the idea of the comic and satire, suggesting that humor is found, through reflection, at the intersection between laughter and pity (Pirandello *On Humor* 113)—in this case, between the humor in the obvious contrast between how these individuals present themselves in light of their age, and their seeming obliviousness to how ridiculous they look to others. The distinction between the comic, satirical, and humorous becomes clear in these examples of aging bodies; to explain the difference in these concepts, Pirandello writes,

> the comic writer will merely laugh, being content to deflate this metaphor of ourselves created by spontaneous illusion; the satirist will feel disdain towards it; the humorist does neither: through the ridiculousness of the discovery, he will see the serious and painful side; he will dissemble the construction, but not solely to laugh at it; and, instead of feeling disdain, he will rather, in his laughter, feel compassion (*On Humor* 132).\(^{55}\)

The reflexive aspect of humor is noticeably absent from the Bergsonian comic, yet, it is difficult to ignore the correspondences between the comic and Pirandello’s humor. Bergson

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\(^{55}\) Ma il comico ne riderà solamente, contentandosi di sgonfiar questa metafora di noi stessi messa su dall’illusione spontanea; il satirico se ne sdegnerà; l’umorista, no: attraverso il ridicolo di questa scoperta vedrà il lato serio e doloroso; smonterà questa costruzione, ma non per riderne solamente; e in luogo di sdegnarsene, magari, ridendo, compatirà (*L’umorismo* 154).
asserts that the comic necessitates indifference and detachment, and that one cannot laugh with complete awareness of the serious of a situation (Laughter 186; 197-198). Even though Pirandello does not refer specifically to Bergson in his treatise on the subject, there is, in Pirandellian humor, an initial comic reaction, as the subject attempts to arrest the movement of life, imposing a mask that fixes in time, and in this act of fixing, interrupts an otherwise fluid reality. This interruption gives rise to laughter, which in turn gives way to an introspection. We laugh at Pirandello’s Old Woman because she looks ridiculous, and we stop laughing when the possible motivations for her appearance betray her miserable, tenuous hold on love. Thus, Pirandello’s humor unfolds across time, as people try and fail to impose rigidity on that which is fluid; pity grows out of the initial laughter that is a result of this imposition.

Though Henry perhaps starts out as the object of laughter and the focus of pity, he emerges as the ultimate humorist, knowledgeable as he is of his own motivations for persisting in his illusory world, and laughing at the masks his visitors have donned for each other over the course of their lives to establish identity and continuity, saying to Matilda, while in character as the historical emperor in Act I,

But we all of us cling tight to our conceptions of ourselves, just as he who is growing old dyes his hair. What does it matter that this dyed hair of mine isn’t a reality for you, if it is, to some extent, for me? — you, you my Lady, certainly don’t dye your hair to deceive the others, nor even yourself; but only to cheat your own image a little before the looking-glass. I do it for a joke! You do it seriously! But I assure you that you too, Madam, are in masquerade, though it be in all seriousness; and I am not speaking of the venerable crown on your brows, or the ducal mantle. I am speaking only of the memory you wish to fix in yourself of your fair complexion one day when it pleased you – or of your dark complexion, if you were dark: the fading image of your youth (Henry IV 169-170)!56

56 Ma tutti, pur non di meno, seguittiamo a tenerci stretti al nostro concetto, così come chi invecchia si ritinge i capelli. Che importa che questa mia tintura non possa essere, per voi, il color vero dei miei capelli? – Voi, Madona, certo non ve li tingete per ingannare gli altri, né voi; ma solo un poco – poco poco – la vostra immagine davanti allo specchio. Io lo faccio per ridere. Voi lo fate sul serio. Ma vi assicuro che per quanto sul serio, siete mascherata anche voi, Madona; e non dico per la venerabile corona che vi cinge la fronte, e a cui m’inchino, o per il vostro
Henry speaks about Matilda’s masquerade for herself, as she clings to the idea of her youthful beauty; Matilda, in controlling her appearance so that she may preserve some of her youth, refers to the interruption which the Pirandellian mask, the likes of which Henry’s describes above, suggests. Why shouldn’t a man or woman in his or her forties or fifties appear as such? In attempting to arrest (or, at best, hide) the aging process, Matilda only highlights how much she has changed since her portrait was painted. Pirandello’s analysis (by way of Henry) allows that such obvious manipulations and masquerades can be real for the person who is the driving force behind them, but the rest of the world may not, and more likely will not, accept them as real. The individual’s conception of themselves ends at the limits of their body and experience. Mutual understanding once again proves impossible to achieve.

In his humoristic observations on his world and visitors, Henry seems to have the upper hand, yet he is powerless when confronted with the opportunity to return to the world of sanity, convention, and the illusions that give rise to personal identity and continuity of both one’s personal history and a shared, social history. Of course, for the protagonist, “continuity” is already a tall order and one not likely to be filled given his long absence from the "real" world in madness and the abrupt way to which he returned to consciousness of the modern world. In the third act, as Henry begins to reveal the life he had lived, first mad for twelve years, and subsequently feigning madness for the following eight, he begins to illustrate just how far he is from the normal world and how difficult it would be to reintegrate himself into it:

**HENRY IV:** *(Contemplates FRIDA and DI NOLLI, and then looks at the MARCHIONESS, and finally his own costume.)* The combination is very beautiful… Two couples… Very good, very good, Doctor! For a madman, not bad! *(with a slight wave of his hand to BELCREDI.)* It seems to me now to be a carnival out of

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manto ducale; dico soltanto per codesto ricordo che volete fissare in voi artificialmente del vostro color biondo, in cui un giorno vi siete piaciuta; o del vostro color bruno se eravate bruna: l’immagine che vien meno della vostra gioventù *(Enrico IV 2478).*
season, eh? (*Turns to look at him.*) We’ll get rid now of this masquerade costume of mine, so that I may come away with you. What do you say?

**BELCREDI:** With me? With us?

**HENRY IV:** Where shall we go? To the Club? In dress coats and with white ties? Or shall both of us go to the Marchioness’ house?

**BELCREDI:** Wherever you like! Do you want to remain here still, to continue—alone—what was nothing but the unfortunate joke of a day of carnival? It really is incredible, incredible how you have been able to do all of this, freed from the disaster that befell you!

**HENRY IV:** Yes, you see how it was! The fact is that falling from my horse and striking my head as I did, I was really mad for I know not how long…

**DOCTOR:** Ah! Did it last long?

**HENRY IV:** (very quickly to the DOCTOR.) Yes, Doctor, a long time! I think it must have been about twelve years. (Then suddenly turning to speak to BELCREDI.) Thus I saw nothing, my dear fellow, all of that, after that day of carnival, happened for you but not for me: how things changed, how my friends deceived me, how my place was taken by another, and all the rest of it! And suppose my place had been taken in the heart of the woman I loved? … And how should I know who was dead, or who had disappeared? … All this, you know, wasn’t exactly a jest for me, as it seems to you… (*Henry IV 201-202)*

What at the outset appears to be an easy fix for the outsiders soon proves to be more difficult and traumatic. What life will Henry live? In whom will he confide? What place can he occupy in a world that left him behind so many years ago? Even Matilda objects to Henry returning with them and repeats the refrain that this is all the result of an unfortunate joke (*Henry IV* 205). The

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*ENRICO IV: […] (Contempla FRIDA e il DI NOLLI, poi guarda la Marchesa ed infine si guarda l’abito addosso.)

Eh, bellissima la combinazione… Due coppie… Benissimo, benissimo, dottore: per un pazzo… (*Accenna appena con la mano al Belcredi.*) A lui sembra ora una carnevalata fuori di tempo, eh? (*Si volta a guardarli.*) Via, ormai, anche questo mio abito da mascherato! Per venirmene, con te, è vero?

**BELCREDI:** Con me! Con noi!

**ENRICO IV:** Dove, al Circolo? In marsina e cravatta bianca? O a casa, tutti e due insieme, della Marchesa?

**BELCREDI:** Ma dove vuoi! Vorresti rimanere qua ancora, scusa, a perpetuare — solo — quello che fu lo scherzo disgraziato d’un giorno di carnevale? È veramente incredibile, incredibile come tu l’abbia potuto fare, liberato dalla disgrazia che t’era capitata!

**ENRICO IV:** Già. Ma vedi? È che, cadendo da cavallo e battendo la testa, fui pazzo per davvero, io, non so per quanto tempo…

**DOTTORE:** Ah, ecco, ecco! E durò a lungo?

**ENRICO IV** (*rapidissimo, al DOTTORE):* Sì, dottore, a lungo: circa dodici anni. (*E subito, tornando a parlare al Belcredi.*) E non vedere più nulla, caro, di tutto ciò che dopo quel giorno di carnevale avvenne, per voi e non per me; le cose, come si mutarono; gli amici, come mi tradirono; il posto preso da altri, per esempio… che so! ma supponi nel cuore della donna che tu amavi; e chi era morto; e chi era scomparso… tutto questo, sai? non è stata mica una burla per me, come a te pare! (*Enrico IV 2494).*
seriousness of the “joke” and its painful consequences in Henry’s life become clear when speaking of his hair:

HENRY IV: Look at my hair (Shows [BELCREDI] the hair on the nape of his neck)
BELCREDI: But mine is grey too!
HENRY IV: Yes, with this difference: that mine went grey here, as Henry IV, do you understand? And I never knew it! I perceived it all of a sudden, one day, when I opened my eyes; and I was terrified because I understood at once that not only had my hair gone grey, but that I was all grey, inside; that everything had fallen to pieces, that everything was finished; [and] I was going to arrive, hungry as a wolf, at a banquet which had already been cleared away… (Henry IV 203)\(^{58}\)

It is in these moments, when Henry’s anguish caused by the time that was lost, is unmistakable and we can no longer laugh at his predicament. The remarks of the “secret advisors” regarding their charge, and the attitudes of Belcredi and Doctor Genoni emerge as considerate and irresponsible. These interactions represent the full extent of the cruel prank that resulted in Henry’s madness; at every turn, whatever individual power the protagonist believed himself to have is undermined. In his youth, he was targeted for being something of an oddity, and at the time of the play, he is a feeble, insane old man. The comic imposition of the mask on the flow of life gives way to the tragic isolation that marks the departure of Pirandellian humor from the Bergsonian comic.

2.1 Perception, Memory and the Body in Henry IV

Even if Bergson’s comments on the nature of the comic remain some of his most enduring, it is his work on time, free will, and memory (and how Pirandello seems to draw on all

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\(^{58}\) ENRICO IV: E guardami qua i capelli! (Gli mostra i capelli sulla nuca.)
BELCREDI: Ma li ho grigi anch’io!
ENRICO IV: Sì, con questa differenza: che li ho fatti grigi qua, io, da Enrico IV, capisci? E non me n’ero mica accorto! Me n’accorsi in un giorno solo, tutta un tratto, riaprendo gli occhi, e fu uno spavento, perché capii subito che non solo i capelli, ma doveva esser diventato grigio tutto così, e tutto crollato, tutto finito: e che sarei arrivato con una fame da lupo a un banchetto già bell’e spiacchiato (Enrico IV 2494).
of them in some way) that offer some of the most expansive possibilities for analysis of Pirandello’s dramaturgy of time.

Bergson considers, in part, the limits of our language when it comes to describing time. In the *Essai*, Bergson offers a definition of freedom which is fundamentally different from the dominant understandings of time and temporality that were, up to that point, heavily influenced by Kant. Kant’s idea of free will is, simply put, that we are free whenever the cause to act is held within us and we are able to choose what we do. If the cause of our actions is outside of the scope of our control, then we are not free. For Kant, time becomes the sticking point, and he asserts that though we might have possessed an ability to control our choices in the past (e.g. the choice to commit a crime), once that choice is in the past, it cannot be changed. Thus, the real issue is whether a choice or cause of action is in control presently, not if it is an external or internal influence on the individual.

“Free will” proves a troubling concept for Bergson, who largely deviates from Kant’s work on freedom and temporality. While the term is typically loaded with assumptions about individual motivations and rational choice (Guerlac 42), Bergson offers a far more nuanced consideration of what it means to be free. While it is hardly worth saying that people are not automatons and are not bound by mechanistic laws or logical principles, bearing that observation in mind as a point of comparison to Bergson’s definition of free will may prove especially helpful (42). For Bergson, freedom is really achieved through a contemplation of experience that is unmediated through language or quantitative assessments – a “realness” that resists symbolization (42). Thus, Bergson’s work fundamentally deviates from the long tradition influenced by Kant; for Bergson, it is language that is the problem (Gillies 16). Language fixes ever-changing sensations, and prevents the individual from thinking about or discussing our “immediate experiences independent of space” (16).
How are space, time, and experience linked? Bergson’s work on time emerges, in part from a fundamental rejection of the Aristotelian assumption that time is a phenomenon which can be measured (Durie 152). Instead, Robin Durie notes that, "for Bergson, duration is a fluid temporal reality that is radically different in kind from the reality of the objective world, the industrial world of mechanistic clock time (temps)" (154). There is a multiplicity of inner states that make up Bergson’s conception of consciousness, and these states interpenetrate one another. As former and present states flow into the subsequent ones, it becomes clear that they cannot be counted, and in fact, to isolate one out of the many, would be to change its nature entirely (154-155). In particular, Bergson takes issue with the ways we are conditioned to describe our feelings and inner states—that is we use the same words to describe feelings as we do the outside world. There is a quantitative aspect to this kind of description, which implies that, for example, a smaller degree of happiness may be contained with a larger degree of happiness, when in fact we should be addressing the qualitative differences between these states of happiness. Much of this work as it relates to Pirandello has been discussed in the preceding chapter in relation to Six Characters, but reducing the scope of the examination to Henry, who stands for both actor and character, yields some particularly useful observations, and lays the groundwork for a deeper analysis with respect to embodied experience and the nature of perception and memory. In Henry IV, the horizon of corporeality (represented by the stage in Six Characters) shifts to the body of Henry himself. The Six Characters speak to experience unmediated by language which Bergson contemplates. Yet, they ultimately project into a world in which language describes space and time with similar terms, and into an artistic form that is dependent upon structure, juxtaposition, and a process in which narrative order would ultimately undermine the timeless vitality that they wish to retain. How does Pirandello complicate this further in writing Henry IV?
In the simplest sense, it would appear that for Henry, the flow of inner states that Bergson identifies in his comments on the nature of time is compromised. As the emperor Henry IV, there was no real personal memory to inform choices, only an unconscious history play in which events and outcomes were already determined and being performed and re-performed. In an initial meeting with the visitors, Henry (as the emperor) rails against the bishops, as representatives of the church, who are identified as part of the emperor’s chief obstacle – the Church:

HENRY IV: Nothing satisfies them! I was a little boy, Monsignor . . . One passes time, playing even, when, without knowing it, one is a king.—I was six years old; and they tore me away from my mother, and made use of me against her without my knowing anything about it… (Henry IV 168).  

After Henry’s return to sanity, it would seem as though he lives in the moment of rupture, the moment when he comes to grips with all that he has missed. In the same scene, before referring to her dyed hair, Henry asks Matilda, “Has it never happened to you, my Lady, to find a different self in yourself? Have you always been the same?” (Henry IV 169). This is one of the essential Pirandellian questions about the nature of reality. As Henry tries to extract and re-play his madness, he changes something fundamental about it, imbuing it with loneliness, anger, and extended reflection on lost time and lost love. This is precisely the problems that the Six Characters face. As the Manager attempts to arrange their story into a structure that would suit the stage, the story is extracted and distilled into a very particular and very limiting narrative. The multiple positions from which the Characters view their story are diminished, and the organic, nuanced whole that they want to preserve is instead sacrificed for intelligibility. *Henry*

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59 ENRICO IV: Nulla è bastato a costoro! – Un povero ragazzo, Monsignore… Si passa il tempo, giocando – anche quando, senza saperlo, si è re. Sei anni avevo e mi rapirono a mia madre, e contro lei si servirono di me, ignaro […] (Enrico IV 2477).

60 A voi non è mai avvenuto, Madonna? Vi ricordate proprio di essere stata sempre la stessa, voi? (Enrico IV 2478).
IV presents a similar outcome. Though he may have been unconscious of it, Henry’s madness and its specific historical parameters afforded him fluidity in his interpretation of the emperor’s life and experiences. For example, if he sincerely believed himself to be the emperor, then it can stand that the prospect of excommunication and his feelings and actions in response to it were genuine, even without the actual emperor’s political efficacy. In his adoption of the role of a madman who believes himself to be Henry IV, the protagonist extracts and isolates something that was once fluid and organic, changing it. Henry is forced to remember not only his madness, but also his life before it, and it is in that remembering which Bergson’s work continues to serve us.

But, like the Six Characters coming to understand the ontological impasse between themselves and the acting company, Henry confronts the restrictions of his visitors’ beliefs about him. To them, he is just a madman on the verge of being cured—hence the presence of a doctor in the party. The group’s inability to imagine Henry as complexly as he imagines himself reflects the predicament of the Six Characters. Matilda, Belcredi, and the others are able to identify change over time within themselves, but see Henry as arrested intellectually and emotionally. If we might allow for a bit of wordplay, they wish to “fix” Henry literally with a cure, but also figuratively, as they reposition him from one instant of arrested development (as mad) to another (as cured). Like the Manager tries to fix the Six Characters in a dramatic structure that might be suited to representation on stage, Henry’s visitors only wish to advance his story so far as it fits their narrative of the madman being cured.

That Henry’s madness stems from an injury to his body allows for a deeper discussion about the role of the body in the individuals understanding of time. Bergson’s second significant work on time, Matter and Memory, identifies the body as “an ever advancing boundary between the future and the past, as a pointed end, which our past is continually driving forward into our
future” (Bergson Matter and Memory 88). This work provides a more grounded extension of the work laid out in Time and Free Will, not unlike the logical progression between the theoretical concerns of Six Characters and their logical extensions in Henry IV. The place of the body becomes of central importance in the interrelated process of perception and memory. Likewise, Henry’s body (and the injuries which cause the normal mechanisms of perception and memory filtered through it to break down) occupy a central role in his revenge tragedy.

Looking towards the place Bergson identifies where perception and memory are joined a fluid, related process—the brain—we begin to understand how the failure of Henry’s mind after the fall is equally a failure of the body. The mind-body dualism that Bergson explores here extends the work of Time and Free Will. According to David Addyman, Matter and Memory considers the “problematic relationship between world and mind—more specifically, how consciousness, so different from the world, can nevertheless be moved by that world” (Addyman 25). Bergson proposes an idea of “pure perception,” which accounts for, “the experience of the world as described by realism, which is to say, no experience at all, since it does not involve memory” (26). However, there is really no way in which perception or memory could function in this pure way—perception always involves memory and they interpenetrate each other (26). According to Addyman, in Time and Free Will, “real perception implies duration: we decide how to move in response to a movement in the world in the present, in order to act in the future, involving the past through the memory that we actualize in the process of choosing the best response” (26). Memory helps negotiate the divide between the mind and body/self and world; memory mediates between Pure Perception and Pure Memory (26).

Looking at this relationship between perception and memory, we can already see how these activities consistently fail Henry by virtue of his injury. Memory and perception are suspect in Henry IV, primarily because these interrelated processes imply continuity of
experience, which for Henry is suspended in his madness. Bergson’s work in *Matter and Memory* departs from the assumption that memories are somehow “stored” in the brain and can be accessed independently of their perception through the body or their place in time (27). Instead, the brain could be likened to a telephone switchboard; it does not contribute to the stimulus it receives, only connects them (automatic actions), or “puts them on hold” (voluntary actions) (Guerlac 112). Thus, the body is at the center of action (Bergson *Matter and Memory* 2), serving as the point which penetrates the plane of the present in Bergson’s famous inverted cone diagram (See Figure 3.1) in Chapter 3 of *Matter and Memory*. Point S exists in the present (the Plane P it intersects), but it is a moving target (Guerlac 150). The Base AB, which is fixed, represents all the memories that have been accumulated (150). Memories reappear at point S when they descend from AB (151). A second version of the diagram (See Figure 3.2) divides the cone into sections, representing unlimited intermediary positions of the repetitions of the “psychological life” as A’B’ and A”B” (152). This cone represents l’esprit, with action (S) at one extreme and dream (AB) at the other (152). Memory and perception are controlled by the movement up and down this cone (152). AB stands for Pure Memory, S for Pure Perception.

But, Bergson also comments on the nature of dreams, defined as “a state of mind that occurs when one’s attention is not anchored by the sensori-motor equilibrium of the body” (Guerlac, citing Bergson’s *Matter and Memory*, 154). Can we liken Henry’s world to a dream? What is the nature of his actions when considered in the voluntary /involuntary paradigm of action the Bergson offers?

What do the biographical details of Henry’s life offer to this analysis? Henry adopted his role of the historical emperor when Matilda selected hers by virtue of her name; her representation of the medieval Matilda of Tuscany would be accompanied by his representation of Henry IV, with whom she is associated because, in the Investiture Controversy of the 11th
Figure 3.1: Bergson’s model for the intersection of the body and perception with the present (Bergson *Matter and Memory* 197)

Figure 3.2: Bergson’s model for *l’esprit* and the movement between action and dream (Bergson *Matter and Memory* 211)
and 12th centuries, Matilda of Tuscany was instrumental in the Pope's decision to readmit Henry into the Church after his penance at Canossa (Blumenthal 123). Pirandello’s script indicates that Henry studied his role with an intensity that perhaps confounded his fellow masqueraders, and his study was so involved that upon coming out of unconsciousness after his head injury, he believed himself to be Henry IV, recently excommunicated and trapped between the years 1077 and 1080. It might be just, then, to equate this period of madness with a dream-like state. Henry (the madman, not the emperor) makes no forward motion in a political sense, repeating and revisiting moments of the historical timeline, surrounded by “advisors” who are enlisted to look after him and to see to his needs. There is nothing (at least nothing is suggested) that grounds his perceptions or stimulates his memory during this period. For Bergson, memory survives in two ways: First as motor memory, which is internalized in the body, and as the “memory of imagination,” which “registers and retains everything, picturing ‘all past events with their outline, their color, and their place in time’” (Addyman, citing Bergson, 27). The second form of memory, unlike motor memory, is personal and unrepeatable (27). What Henry’s madness offers is not a re-embodiment of Henry IV’s actions and experiences, but an idea of him, filtered through careful study, and perhaps the latent heartbreak of knowing that the woman Henry (the protagonist) loved, would never really be his. For Bergson, both forms of memory are inseparable (27). Body and image memory work together—mostly obviously in the process of recognition—and perception needs memory to be complete, as demonstrated by the cone diagram (27). During this period of madness, there wasn’t, as suggested by the script, anything to link these processes in meaningful ways. Henry suddenly “wakes up” into his proper

61 Aleida Assmann, citing Susan Sontag, also points to the personal and unrepeatable nature of memory in her 2008 article, “Transformation between History and Memory” (49). Considering how the protagonist attaches significance to the historical narrative, the intersections between history and memory in this way offers another potentially fruitful point of entry into the drama.
historical period, and like he says, finds that he has gone all grey, inside and out, and that the
world he knew left him behind.

This consideration of the body naturally returns us to the question of free will raised in
Bergson’s earlier work on time. If we take the Kantian view of free will with respect to Henry,
we can root all of the protagonist’s decisions (those made in both his period of madness and his
“feigned madness” alike) in the injury that altered his relationship to the world; thus, there is no
authentic freedom. But as previously noted, in Bergson’s worldview, freedom is achieved when
the individual contemplates experience in a way that resists symbolization and mediation through
language. If anything, what we have in both Henry’s real and feigned madness is a failure to
achieve the kind of freedom that Bergson advocates. The trauma that was inflicted on Henry’s
body drives him into the future and influences all actions and choices (unconscious and
conscious). The nature of his injury, as well as the sheer amount of time spent impaired by it,
precludes any possibility of Henry engaging meaningfully with the world around him.

If this injury is what ultimately drives Henry forward, does he really achieve anything in
his pursuit? Did his feigned madness really afford him the ability to live as freely as he proposes
near the conclusion of the play, when he asserts—

I preferred to remain mad—since I found everything ready and at my disposal for
this new exquisite fantasy. I would live it—this madness of mine—with the most
lucid consciousness and thus revenge myself on the brutality of a stone which had
dinted [my] head,

a statement later augmented by his observation that “One walks about as a tragic character, just
as it were nothing” (Pirandello Henry IV 204-205).

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62 ENRICO IV: […] preferii restar pazzo – trovando qua tutto pronto e disposto per questa delizia di nuovo genere:
viverla – con la più lucida coscienza – la mia pazzia e vendicarmi così della brutalità d’un sasso che m’aveva
ammaccato la testa! […] E si passeggia come niente, così, da tragico personaggio […] (Enrico IV 2495).
The answer is not so simple when we consider what *Henry IV* has to say about the creative process through which personal identity is developed. Pirandello offers his first dramatic manifestation of his concept of character in *Six Characters*, and the audience witnesses how the characters’ shift from their origin in the imagination of their creator into the realm of action and theatrical convention makes them more real and grounded, but ultimately less true with respect to the convictions that gave them life and drove them forward. But, when trying to explain how the idea of character is relevant with respect to the protagonist of *Henry IV*, we are confronted with the problem that Henry, the character in the play, does not ostensibly stand in for the idea of a character in the same way that Pirandello’s *Six Characters* do. Rather, we must consider him as the doubled entity that he is—standing as both actor and character, not to mention the theoretical can of worms opened when we consider this the transformation of this text into a performance. A character is not a person and resists in large part the worn-out generalizations of what it might mean “to be” in terms of conventional experience. The body of the character is not its own; instead, it is the body of the actor through which the audience comes to know the character, and it is through the body of Henry—made-up and costumed as he is—that the party of visitors confront the degree to which he was accidentally and then consciously isolated from the world around him. It is in this way that we can begin to understand the complicated place of Henry’s body in his experience of time.

When Pirandello’s *Six Characters* face embodiment in the work of the acting company, the scope of their possibilities become reduced, limited by the physical constraints that the actors’ bodies pose for them and the conventions which facilitate the telling of their story in a theatrical context. Henry’s fictionalized emperor finds its main source in trauma; the first inflicted upon the body of the young man in the masquerade and the second felt in his emergence from madness to find a body that has aged without partaking in the passage of time that, for his
visitors, has made the maturing process, if not wholly fulfilled, at least seemingly continuous and fluid. But, the emperor that Henry attempts to play is not the historical emperor which he studied. Instead, this monarch was born out of discontinuity, breakage, and rupture. Disregarding for a moment the theatrical context in which the drama is played for an audience in favor of the theoretical implications of the private performance that Henry gives, and then interrupts, for his visitors, we confront in Henry the doubled relationship of character and actor, and of a healed body that nevertheless remembers, and relives, the long-term effects of an injury. Henry’s adoption of the persona of the fictional emperor, viewed through the lens of madness and a long absence from the context that gives structure and background to the life experience of his visitors, speaks, in part, to the unmediated contemplation of experience that, for Bergson, is the essence of free will, and the pre-linguistic foundation that is the character’s (conceptual) foundation. Pirandello’s call for “spoken action” in 1899 is considerable, expressing the need for a dialogue that does not preserve or symbolize action, but is itself action, written in a manner that is on par with the fluidity of durée—grasped as it is through intuition and incomplete in revealing the whole of the inner states of which it is comprised. Henry approaches this sort spoken action in his attempt to live at the point of rupture between madness and sanity.

But, then, how to account for the following years of “sane-madness?” How are perception and memory filtered differently after Henry’s “recovery?” In the best sense, the links between these processes are re-established, but continuity is still an issue. Henry’s decision to take refuge in the semblance of madness complicates the notion of voluntary and involuntary. Is it even possible to say that his adoption of Henry IV as his mask becomes second nature, or is it the unmasking itself, the story of the play, the thing that truly complicates? I propose the latter, if only to ask what is revealed when the mask of the madman is removed?
3 On Continuity in *Henry IV*

Husserl’s account of the phenomenology of internal time consciousness opens up some of the aspects of *Henry IV’s* dramaturgy of time that have been identified in the preceding section—particularly with respect to the lingering question of continuity. Husserl finds that time and our experience of it has profound ontological implications, and *Henry IV* suggests how a disruption in that experience of time’s flow further confounds the larger philosophical problem of what it means “to be.” Husserl set out a philosophy which “presents a unified account of our experience, the world we live in, our bodies, ourselves, our knowledge (commonplace and scientific), our values, our social institutions, and so on, explicating the forms or essences of these things and their interrelations” (Woodruff Smith 41).

But, in order to understand how Husserl might characterize being in *Henry IV*, we must first understand how Husserl characterizes being in general, and how his understanding of time contributes to this analysis. Husserl’s early work reconsiders the doctrines of realism and idealism. Colloquially and artistically, these terms have very different meanings than to that which Husserl was responding, and his work, in part, offers a new understanding. Realism, in the simplest regard, posits that everything exists, from skyscrapers to electrons, regardless of whether or not we see, know, or think about those things (55). Idealism offers the opposite premise, suggesting that the existence of an object in the world is predicated upon our thinking and knowing about it (55).

Husserl, in extending Brentano’s work on intentionality, finds a way to reconcile the real with the ideal through phenomenology. In offering an ontological construct which identifies an act of consciousness, its content, and its object as three distinct, but interdependent features of experience, Husserl mitigates the problems which arise when realism and idealism confront one
another. Consciousness is not amorphous or abstract, but is instead always directed at an object, that is to say, an act of consciousness is intentional (56). Object and content are of particular importance in this regard. The object towards which my consciousness is directed may conceivably exist in the real world—a house, for example. But the way I experience the house, the way I perceive it and allow it to impress itself upon my consciousness, the intention of that act, is the content, or noema in Husserl’s terminology (57). Here is where the real and the ideal meet, for even if the real object—in this case, a house—is changed or destroyed, the content of my consciousness, directed towards the house in that moment doesn’t change. The content functions as an ideal (57). While it appears simple, the reconsideration of the relationship between the real and the ideal offers a profoundly different understanding of time, and lays the foundation for Husserl’s transcendental idealism,

Time is an essential feature of intentionality—we cannot fully appreciate intentionality without coming to grips with the temporal dimensions of intentional acts and intentional objects (Zahavi 80). Husserl calls attention to a “synthesis of identity,” that unfolds across time as an object presents different aspects of itself. Dan Zahavi, in his survey of Husserl’s phenomenology offers the following as an example: “If I move around an oak in order to obtain a more exhaustive presentation of it, then the different profiles of the oak do not present themselves as disjointed fragments, but are perceived as synthetically integrated moments” (80). If intentionality is temporal in nature, is it possible to lose oneself in insanity and still have intentionality? What, if any synthesis of identity, does Henry undergo in his story, in both his madness and his sane-madness?

In addressing that question, it is necessary to address one of the most important features of phenomenology, which, for our purposes, is that everything is perceived of and considered with respect to “I,” that is, the first person (Woodruff Smith 188). Thus, the aforementioned
“act of consciousness” finds more specificity in that it is rooted in the experience of an individual and his or her perception of an object or event. Empathy, too, is much more about evaluating the experiences and feelings of another as though one were experiencing that moment themselves (197). We may even find an analog to Pirandello’s humor in the first-person centered understanding of experience, as the act of reflection required in the construction of humor that emerges out of our own laughter, not the laughter of someone else. Of course, these concepts form some of the foundations of phenomenology. With time as the primary point of access into my survey of Pirandello’s drama, let us delve deeper into how Husserl believes time to function.

We are aware of time’s passage when we do or experience things that transpire across time (204-205). To reiterate, the experience of events or objects across time consists of the following structures, introduced in the preceding chapter: Primal Impression, Protention, Retention. Like Bergson, Husserl uses a melody to demonstrate how these structures of time consciousness function in relation to one another. The most basic constituent of a melody, a tone, sounds, which immediately and continuously recedes into an ever-distant past. The listener holds onto that tone in recent memory as additional tones sound in the present, the now-phase. If the sounding tones each represents a temporal phase that constitutes the present now, then we are conscious of that “now” point as having continuity with the immediate past (Husserl 26).

Even in the simple example of a melody, Husserl suggests that our fundamental understanding of time consciousness is bound up in our sense of continuity with the immediate past. Successiveness is an essential part of Husserl's ontology (Cerbone 25-27), and this successiveness, in conjunction with the structure of protection and retention, will lend support to a continued analysis of Henry IV.

We have very few details about the nature of Henry’s madness in the play. The reader/audience is told that the protagonist believes himself to be the emperor Henry IV and
conducts himself as such, but the details of that conduct are largely left to the imagination. At the end of Act II, it is revealed that his sanity returned and he was immediately aware of how much time he had lost (when he saw, for example, his grey hair in his reflection). Of particular interest is that he seems to remember some of his behaviors in madness, since he is able to reproduce them effectively for his “secret advisors” for an additional eight years.

In the strictest understanding of phenomenology, only acts of consciousness are suitable for analysis (Woodruff Smith 191). While it is perhaps fair to call madness a kind of unconsciousness, its central place in the dramaturgy of Henry IV and in Pirandello’s creative work overall makes it hard to dismiss wholesale. Henry’s madness destabilizes the fundamental structures of time consciousness and intentionality that is essential to Husserlian ontology and phenomenology. So, how could we even account for madness in Pirandello’s problematic engagement with time in the play?

Phenomenology, in its most basic regard, requires that individuals attend to actual experience, not its causal structure (Cerbone 3) and Husserl’s foundational work in the field demands that the observer does not take himself or herself out of the process of experiencing (15). Simply stated, as we begin to describe experience, we must recognize that it is happening to us, and that we can only speak for ourselves and from our position in relation to an event (15). Thus, Henry IV, in its play with time and memory, begins to confront serious ontological questions about what it actually means to be present.

Since successiveness and continuity are so central to Husserl’s understanding of time consciousness and ultimately the question of “being present,” the ways in which protention and retention are treated must undergo a fundamental revision to get to the heart of Pirandello’s dramaturgy in Henry IV. If Henry’s period of legitimate madness was characterized by a haphazard “jumping” from historical moment to historical moment (regardless of their
chronological order) then I would propose that the “now” of the primal impression is ultimately divorced from the accompanying protention and retention. Of these two, retention is perhaps the most troubling aspect for Henry’s story, as it is undermined by Henry's break from the flow of experience. As previously described, retention is the process in which impressions sink back deeper and deeper into memory and help to establish a sense of continuity between past and present, but because Henry was not in a state where he could make memories and access them in a conventional way, this sense of continuity is lost. Henry, in his madness, may be able to play into (or with) the moments his illness is driving him to reenact, but they do not establish continuity in the long term and award him no political or personal efficacy in his endeavors.

The ideas of intentionality and transcendental idealism consequently suffer as well. In madness, Henry plays with the structure of time consciousness not as himself, but as an historic, long-dead emperor. How can we even characterize his behavior in madness? If his illness manifested as a belief in being the Holy Roman Emperor Henry IV, what does the relative lack of risk to his person or perceived power mean to his actions? Can we even properly contextualize the character in this regard? In his later publications, Husserl begins to consider the idea of the “alien” and its relationship with “historicity.” The alien speaks to an experience which is completely foreign, with no basis for comparison in the individual’s realm of experience (Moran and Cohen 30). Relatedly, historicity suggests that even cultures or experiences that are foreign to the individual within his stream of consciousness and horizon of experience are themselves part of a “historical trajectory” that charges them with familiarity and meaning within a culture (145-146).

Of course, the question if the idea of the alien which Husserl offers really accounts for some of the questions in Pirandello’s drama persists. In short, the answer is both yes and no. Henry, as a result of his intense character study, suffers from a madness shaped by research and
so can approach the different moments of recreation with a kind of contextual understanding, albeit removed by generations of history and understood according to the parameters of the historical narrative imposed by the texts that he chose to read. But, it is still not his own time or place, and his actions in madness might be understood in conjunction with a different kind of historicity, with the actions not of an emperor, but of a very sick man isolated from his community.

Even empathy is troubled by the madness which Henry suffers. Can we even rightly suggest that his actions in madness come from a place of empathy with the historical subject, the emotional charge of his sane madness notwithstanding? For Husserl, empathy “is an imaginative reproduction of the other’s experience as if one were living through it oneself” (Woodruff Smith 197). We certainly can’t call Henry’s madness a kind of empathy—he is not consciously imagining himself (the modern man) in the position of the medieval emperor, but instead, through illness, really believing himself to be the historical figure, nor is he doing so after he emerged from the period of madness. Rather than an actor playing a character (a task for which some performer may call on empathy to inform their choices) Henry instead filtered his “historical play” through the lens of his own sense of lost time and anger, in the knowledge that once he turned his back, his attendants would extinguish the candles and turn on the electric lights (Pirandello Henry IV 193).

Upon these basic premises, it is clear why “unconscious acts” resist analysis according to Husserl’s terms and conditions for examination. Yet as the extended period for which Henry acts unconsciously (in which I have demonstrated the structures of time consciousness are undermined and his sense of continuity is disrupted) lays the foundation for an even more troubling and complex imagination of time consciousness; when Henry realizes his predicament and elects to play himself as mad, his roles as madman, king, and patient (both of the presently
sick and the now cured variety) become bound up in a complicated interplay of varied realities, each of which may have their own temporal dimension. The protagonist’s role in *Henry IV* is a composite of many things, so in this sane madness, how do the structures of time consciousness undergo a re-imagining?

Looking at the distinct layers of reality within the work, it is difficult to account for a sense of continuity supported by a straightforward analysis according to Husserl’s terms, and it is in this where *Henry IV*’s potential as a more logical extension of the discussion of Pirandello’s dramaturgy of time as considered in *Six Characters* is best realized. At one time, we have 1) Henry’s historical reenactments of episodes in the emperor’s life 2) Henry’s play of the madman as *Henry*, in which he at once manipulates his attendants under the guise of being mentally ill and also monitors/adjusts his own behavior in light of his own desire for revenge, power, or solitude (the specific question of which I leave to the artists who perform the play), and 3) Henry’s apparent place as a delusional madman under the care of his secret advisors, and subject to the whims of his visitors and Dr. Genoni. While there are probably more acts of doubling and layering of distinct levels of reality that could be considered, let us contemplate two. In one, if taken by itself, we are offered a historical drama (more or less). The episodes of the story might be out of order, but given enough time and examples, some semblance of a narrative might be drawn from them. In another, through the lens of the visitors and the attendants, everything, right up until Henry’s confession, is in its proper place. The madman jumps from year to year at random, but he has been like this for nearly 20 years, and through that time, people have been living their lives and occasionally checking in on him to see if there was any sign of improvement.

But moving beyond these, we can investigate a third act of doubling, one that is far more self-conscious and consequently, the most interesting. This is, of course, Henry’s “sane-
madness,” by which performs and re-performs what has been the story of his life, not that of the emperor. The choice to, in effect, dramatize what had been, for him, a period of illness and how this illness characteristically manifested itself is not unlike what the Characters confront in their negotiations with the Actors. Even if Henry asserts that there is freedom and power in his choice, there is still a filter in place, and once sane, it can be argued, Henry can no longer preserve the lively, unpredictable character of his madness. He both is and is not himself, and like the Father in *Six Characters*, perhaps cannot truly see the actual madman in the playing of the role. In *Six Characters*, the director asserts that costume and make-up will take care of any major differences in appearance between the characters and Actors. In *Henry IV*, hair and costume do, to some extent, recall Henry’s madness and the presences of his visitors in the midst of his injury. But just as in *Six Characters*, the costumes and make-up cannot entirely resolve the epistemological and ontological problems that they are intended to address. The conscious doubling of character in Henry’s “sane-madness” restructure the components of Husserl’s time consciousness, as Henry, in his awareness of manipulating his environment and the people in it, is conscious always of his actions and decisions, and yet tries to project the unpredictability of his past madness into that environment.

When this play of madness is revealed to the visitors, the structures of time consciousness, as well as the concept of empathy is troubled again. They cannot imagine a world without continuity, and they can’t really place themselves into Henry’s predicament. The structures of time consciousness that help individuals situate themselves in the flow of time are inextricably linked with the ontological foundations of being—understanding where and when you are. In interrupting and restructuring these aspects of experience sets the ontological and epistemological impasse that is at the heart of this, and all of Pirandello’s important works. To
understand it, and to try to make it intelligible, Henry, in adopting a theatrical framework, turns to the world of art, as we see in the next section.

4 Memory, Madness and the Dramaturgy of Time: *Henry IV* as Monument to Rupture

The artifice of the theatre and performance may confront limitations in an analysis guided by Husserl’s output; however, Heidegger’s comments on the nature of time and the origin of the work of art may help to mitigate the obstacles which arise in such a case. While it is not one of Pirandello’s theatre plays, *Henry IV* does attend to some of the problems of theatrical creation and practice that *Six Characters* addresses directly—the complex relationship between actor and character and the translation of the dramatist’s original idea to word and action on stage. We see in the play a distinct fascination with the social components of identity and the failure of mutual understanding—the indelible marks of Pirandello’s relativistic and decentered universe. Through the lens of Henry’s madness and the unreliable memories of those who visit him in the play’s early moments, Pirandello reflects back to a world where meaning and identity are nothing more than the masks individuals don for one another. Yet the ontological superiority that Pirandello appears to bestow upon his earlier characters is noticeably withheld from Henry. But why? What is it about this character that makes him different from another Character (that is, with a capital “C”)?

The protagonist’s activities are often characterized as “feigned madness” or “sane madness” in the literature surrounding this play; however, these descriptors do not seem to get to the heart of what is really at work in the drama. What Henry accomplishes is not as simple as memorizing a text (or even improvising according to a set of criteria which identifies his
character as the historical emperor). Instead, as I have attempted to outline throughout this chapter, Henry offers a play of his own madness.

But the complexity of Henry’s play is not accounted for only by treating this protagonist as something that is representative of a human being. *Six Characters in Search of an Author* sets dramatic characters in relief against the actors (ostensibly human) who are tasked with playing them. So far, time in *Henry IV* has been considered in relation to memory and the body (as in Bergson) and through the lens of intentionality and the meaning of being in the present (as in Husserl). While such analyses treat the subject of time as it relates to the human condition and the individual’s experience of reality—and certainly Pirandello uses his art to say a great deal about people and how they construct themselves and their world—what has not yet been afforded necessary attention is the process of making oneself that is a feature of human experience. Certainly, such a consideration of this process of becoming is implicit in these analyses, since when dealing with time, memory, and presence, one might always look back to past moments or experiences which inform immediate decisions. A person may bear the marks of change on or in their body, or sense how experiences build or accumulate across time like a melody. But to speak to the construction of a world or a person’s sense of self, it is necessary to turn to a means of construction that is perhaps more conscious. In this regard, Heidegger’s comments about being and becoming, specifically with regards to the work of art, are especially useful.

Heidegger situates the work of art always in relation to the “world.” While the concept of “world” would undergo a long transformation over the course of Heidegger’s output, by the time he began to conceptualize the role of the work of art in making world and reinforcing that world’s value’s, it comes to mean “an openness in which all things have their places, proximities, and times” (Dahlstrom, no page). It is worth noting that “world” in Heidegger’s terms, is not the
same as “earth,” which, is the environment in which actions transpire (Petruzzi 60). “World” may, therefore, be taken as a kind of self-understanding set against the backdrop of social practices which give structure and meaning (60).

But, Heidegger’s work of art is not simply an object to behold. Rather, it is a monument that calls attention to the “primal conflict” between earth and world, and the work of art situates in space and time (that is, the earth) the values and understandings through which meaning is constituted (the world). The relationship that the work of art has to the world from which it originates and in which it is rooted offers an important point of access into contemplating Pirandello’s dramaturgy of time not only as a comment on the human experience but also one intrinsically linked with the creative process. Up to this point, this analysis has set Henry IV in relief against some the issues and questions raised by Six Characters. Given these plays are chronologically close to one another in Pirandello’s career and considering the problems which embodiment and memory present to the playwright and his creations, this kind of comparison is useful. But, Henry IV is not Six Characters, and this play approaches the topic of memory, time, and embodiment in ways that are complimentary, not identical, to the methods of its predecessor. The narrative arc of Six Characters follows the plight of the Characters as they seek to live in performance—an endeavor which results in failure and a kind of death, though the Characters don’t know that will ultimately be the result when they approach the theatre company. Henry IV turns the process on its head, as its protagonist attempts to partake of the realm of the Six Characters before they are set into a work of art. Even so, Pirandello’s appreciation for the “miracle of art” will get us far in this chapter, especially when this analysis more directly considers the interplay between Six Characters and Henry IV as Henry distances himself from a conventional understanding of reality and the measurable, unidirectional passage of time that it implies, preferring instead to inhabit the realm of dramatic character. But for now, some more
general comments on the nature of dramatic character are required to better situate *Henry IV*’s protagonist in the realm of drama and theatrical performance.

Many have offered their interpretation of the nature of the dramatic character. For example, Bert O. States comments on what would happen if a real person found themselves transformed into a character, writing,

> A dramatic character is, first and foremost, an intensified simplification of human nature: he is a Personality with a Character—someone who appears and behaves in a certain way and who carries within him a certain ethos, or disposition with respect to moral conduct and choice (91).

In short, if a person became a character, he or she would find him or herself with a shrunken range of behavior and a clearer, more resolute system of values. They would experience fewer things, but with greater intensity (91). Henry pursues a similar end, but only in part. He retreats into the world of a character, not performance, where he is free to explore all the possibilities permitted to him without the conscious structural elements and narrative devices of a plot. The world in which Henry resides dispenses with the vast and wide-ranging set of potentialities attributed to the actor and the creative aspect of their craft. Henry restructures his identity into one that is muted and specific.

But States’ explanation does not necessarily account for the artificiality of the dramatic figure, rooted as it is in human nature, albeit a simplification thereof. Manfred Pfister avoids the connotations that the term “character” brings with it and the temptation to define character in relation to a human counterpart, instead introducing the concept of “figure” as a “terminological counterweight to an equally common tendency to discuss dramatic figures as if they were people

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63 It is worth noting that Manfred Pfister distinguishes between story and plot, writing, “Plot is for the presentation what story is for the subject of the presentation. Whilst story consists in the purely chronologically arranged succession of events and occurrences, the plot already contains important structural elements, such as causal and other kinds of meaningful relationships, segmentation in phases, temporal and spatial regroupings etc.” (197).
or characters from real life, and thus to [emphasize] the ontological difference between fictional figures and real characters (161). Pfister establishes the dramatic character as a “deliberate construct,” (161) asserting that,

The connotations of the word 'figure', which hints at something deliberately artificial, produced or constructed for a particular purpose, and evokes the impression of functionality rather than individual autonomy (one is reminded of the figures used in a game of chess) actually go some way towards justifying this particular interpretation. For unlike real characters who, of course, are influenced by their social context, but who on reaching maturity are able to transcend it, dramatic figures cannot be separated from their environment because they only exist in relationship to their environment and are only constituted in the sum of their relations to that environment. Social conditions can influence or determine the life of a real person, but, in drama, the fictional context serves the function of actually defining the fictional figure. What this means can be illustrated by the following comparison: whilst it is perfectly reasonable to ask in real life what Mr Smith would do in Mr Jones's position and vice versa, the question as to how Hamlet would behave in Othello's position and Othello in Hamlet's reflects a complete misunderstanding of the special status of fictional figures and can be no more than a form of unverifiable speculation (Pfister 161).

Proceeding from the discussion on the nature of the character in the previous chapter, this analysis can now begin to better address the ontological questions that Pirandello sets forth in *Henry IV*. There are a number of readily identifiable features at work in the play, some which are doubled in the dramatic arc of the protagonist. Pirandello has consciously constructed a figure who has himself fashioned an artificial figure that operates within distinct boundaries.

Henry’s play is not a historical drama about the emperor Henry IV at Canossa, but instead the play of a man coming to the realization that he was lost for a time to madness. Pirandello’s Henry discloses the nature of that madness (that is, interpreting and replaying the historical events of the emperor’s life) while holding in reserve (until the play’s third act) the knowledge that he was mad and had returned to sanity. The importance of this particular mental framework, as Pirandello presents it, cannot be overstated. Henry’s play is about, and thus preserves, the madness that shaped his life and deprived him of the things he wanted most. It is about the rupture between madness and sanity. Henry establishes for himself a specific set of boundaries
and those boundaries allow him an incredible range of possibilities in which to construct the world and a unique way of living in it.

But what does this all have to do with time, and how does Heidegger’s concept of the monument help to bring the temporal aspect of Pirandellian dramaturgy into focus? *Six Characters* is Pirandello’s first dramatic exploration into the ontological status of characters; *Henry IV* broadens the scope of the inquiry initiated by its predecessor, with a protagonist who does not project into the finished work of a play, but rather into the unfinished, timeless world of Character. In addressing this question of the ontological status of characters in relation to the work of art, it is necessary to return momentarily to the essay “The Concept of Time” (1924), which would lay the foundations for *Being and Time* in 1927. While the features of Dasein discussed in the preceding chapter are useful in approaching our own Being (and eventual non-Being) in the real world, they do not immediately get this analysis closer to evaluating the problems and questions posed by the story and actions of *Henry IV*’s protagonist. But, let us bear in mind always that this analysis is concerned not with the diagnosis of or judgment upon a real individual, but with the epistemological and ontological issues raised by a dramatic character, who is himself using (manipulating, even) methods of play and performance to confront and deal with the peculiar situation in which he finds himself by way of the playwright’s work. The complexity of this performance, coupled with the protagonist’s metaphorical absence that madness imposes and his reaction to his sudden return to sanity, speaks volumes about the nature of being and presence. But, to understand exactly what is being said, it is impossible to disregard the theatrical frameworks and performance conventions which give structure to the play—not simply Pirandello’s chosen medium in drama, but the theatrical framework through which Henry is able to shape and inhabit his world (which itself is contained in the world of the play). To understand Henry, one does not need to diagnose him, and while it
is tempting to consider *Henry IV* as though the protagonist speaks explicitly to some of the fundamental issues of the human condition, this is not the only approach we must take in order to understand the character’s relationship with time. Given *Henry IV*’s chronological position in relation to *Six Characters*, it is not far-fetched to consider this play as having something more to say about the nature of art, creativity, and the sort of vivacity with which Pirandello believes all successful dramatic characters are imbued. By treating Henry (the character) as a Character on par with Pirandello’s Six Characters and like those figures that originate from the realm of art, rather than strictly offering a reduction of human experience (à la *States*), we may see how time and its passage are an integral part of the character’s experience. For guidance in this endeavor, it is particularly useful to return to Heidegger’s comments on art and art-making and Petruzzi’s analysis of *Six Characters* in light of those comments.

*Henry IV* offers a related, if not identical, commentary on the nature of creation and reality to that of its predecessor, *Six Character in Search of an Author*. When we extend Heidegger’s comments on art, and Anthony Petruzzi’s analysis of *Six Characters* through those comments to *Henry IV*, the scale of this epistemological impasse is reduced from a set of characters confronting a company of actors, to the inner conflict of one individual who stands for character and actor. But, unlike his dramatic forebears, the world into which Henry projects is not one of intelligibility. The manager of the earlier play attempts to set down a story that follows a narrative arc, of which the central conflict is between the Father and Stepdaughter. Had the manager been successful in his endeavor, the resulting play would have spoken to a middle-class realist narrative. It would have ultimately been a story of sexual indiscretion and domestic tragedy, demonstrating the consequences of the family’s numerous violations of an implicit social code. By ascribing this type of meaning, this relatively simplistic message undercuts the
vitality of the character and breadth and depth of the life and feeling with which they claim to be imbued.

This necessarily returns us to Heidegger’s concept of the monument. But the resistance to meaning that marks *Six Characters* as a monument is far more volatile and ambiguous in *Henry IV* because it lacks the social dimension required to fit the Six Characters’ story to the stage. What is memorialized here is not his madness (though, we might consider his madness a kind of retreat into his mind). Instead, Henry’s play is a monument to the moment in which his sanity returned, and his world was, in many ways, broken open before his eyes. He lost the woman he loved, and while this is tragic enough that she is lost to him across eight centuries only compounds the painful quality of his illness. Henry’s play of madness lets his visitors, and the audience, into the profound loneliness of the villa and his experience of loss.

There are in *Henry IV* dramaturgical structures comparable to that of *Six Characters*, in addition to works of art that function as artifacts that give shape and meaning to the fictional world of the protagonist. There are the prominently placed (anachronistic) oil paintings of Henry and Matilda as their historical counterparts, the costumes which the visitors don as they participate in the historical drama, and the setting which gives weight and power to the alleged madman at the center of the work. The work of art, if it is oriented towards *Dasein*, is in some way oriented towards *Dasein’s* end. Ultimately, Heidegger’s sense of being is really a “being-towards-death” (McCumber 173). Death is the undoing of relationships—we die alone—and the individual can only encounter death alone (173). Death is inescapable. Someone may die in place of someone else, but the still-living individual has not evaded death permanently (Bossart 59). Death is the ultimate possibility, one that we don’t necessarily pursue, but that we ultimately experience as “certain but indefinite,” to quote John McCumber (173). This ever-
present awareness of death gives structure to the present, allowing the individual to make authentic choices (175).

This naturally raises the issue of whether or not it is possible to attribute authenticity to a dramatic character. The concept does not stand for “the achievement of some kind of radical isolation or eccentricity, akin to the condition of a hermit who shuns society all together” but an ownership over the self and one’s own decisions in the face of shared language and social codes (Cerbone 59; McCumber 172). But insofar as Pirandello’s characters or Heidegger’s works of art are the results of the specific set of conditions from which they emerge and that they constitute both an opening and a closing of the world of which they are apart, Henry’s story offers a unique problem. As previously noted, Petrucci’s analysis of the Six Characters cites their completion in performance a kind of death, one in which moral or social meaning is made explicit, closing them off to other possibilities (66). In the “real world,” which for lack of a better term we might use to refer to the modern reality from which Henry isolates himself in order to play out his madness, a return to sanity would likely be indicated by reintegrating himself into the shared reality of Belcredi, Matilda, and their companions. If we treat such a reintegration as a logical “completion” of Henry’s madness, what it amounts to is akin to the death the Characters see at work in the company’s performance. For Henry to re-emerge as sane and subsequently partake of the present would render something of his experience intelligible, that is to say, he was ill, and now he is cured. It would make for a neat, happy narrative, but one that does not capture the complexity of his experience or the implications of his mental and emotional absence from the world. For Henry, taking up the mantle of a cured man would diminish the depth and breadth of his suffering, and finding such completion in sanity would mark the past as static and inaccessible. He would return a social group whose sense of continuity is markedly different from his own and even those relationships based upon the
presumption of the protagonist’s insanity would be, if not wholly severed, fundamentally altered, undone by the “death” of the madman and replaced by some being who needs to relearn the customs and conditions that make life intelligible. How could authenticity ever be achieved when Henry can’t even understand the rules of the world that contains his Being? In brief, such an endeavor would be doomed to almost certain failure. So, he rejects the possibility, running towards the past instead of the future, trying to stay the possibility of his demise in both the metaphorical and real sense of the word.

Like the Six Characters, who see the imposition of theatrical convention as a way of minimizing and closing their story, for Henry to forever mark that portion of his life as not only inaccessible but also irrelevant would be too high a cost for someone who has already lost so much. Intelligibility is a mark of narrative, and the Characters sacrifice it in order to keep themselves intact. The narrative structure that would give their story a sense of pacing, of flow, and yes, a sense of time, would undermine the vivacity of their story and give it a central point of access which diminishes the magnitude of their existence as Characters. Henry, in his retreat from the world of sanity, tries to participate in the realm of Characters, where timelessness is not an empty sentiment, but a feature of their experience. Henry only makes two real choices in his story. The first is to accept and embody all facets of his sane-madness, and in doing so, remain intact, even if his sense of continuity is unintelligible to everyone else who comes into contact with him. The second is his choice to murder Belcredi. This act is the definitive moment of closing off of all possibilities and an impetus to move forward and face his losses and the possibility of death. Once the truth of Henry’s life is revealed to his visitors and he exacts the long-awaited revenge on his rival, all are thrust into a new world and a new understanding. From his studied madness emerges a madman, evidenced by his fatal interaction with Belcredi at the play’s climax (Pirandello *Henry IV* 207-208).
5 Pirandello and Special Relativity: Henry’s Decentered World

In continuing to conceptualize a dramaturgy of time in *Henry IV*, philosophy and aesthetics only go so far in accounting for the shifting worldview at the turn of the century that would come to inform Pirandello’s output in the 1920s. The scientific innovations of this period reverberate throughout the 20th-century, fundamentally changing the way people saw their world and their place in it.

Nowhere is this more noticeable than in the work of Einstein on relativity, specifically special relativity. At the very heart of the theory of special relativity is the idea that time is not absolutely and objectively quantifiable and that it is relative to the observer (Lightman 60). Thus, relativity corresponds in some ways to the features of Pirandello’s drama. The relativity of personal experience that arises as a theme in Pirandello’s output is again present in *Henry IV*, as Henry’s long absence from and eventual return to sanity results in a markedly different perspective on the world and the visitors who intrude upon his sanctuary.

However, even as we talk about Pirandello’s relativism, we must remember that to analyze the play in a purely scientific framework would be futile—relativity and quantum theory represent a redefinition of scientific understanding of the very foundations of reality and the infinitesimally small particles of which it is comprised. Thus, these principles must be considered analogously in relation to art and drama. In offering a scientific perspective on *Henry IV*, I will demonstrate how the relativism born out of early 20th-century scientific innovation leaves its indelible mark on Pirandello’s drama, which grew up parallel to and out of this new understanding of the world and universe.

The relativism of personal experience that characterizes Pirandello’s work speaks to the erosion of the subject-object duality that dominated western literature between the 5th- and 19th-
centuries (Craige 16). In place of this duality is the monism that traces its roots both to the emergence of Einstein’s 1905 theory and Nietzsche’s declaration that God is dead (16). As humankind loses its reliance upon God, as Nietzsche’s assertion speaks to, it also loses its sense of a “spiritual absolute” and any objective sense of right and wrong (28). As Betty Jean Craige notes, this paradigm shift “is a shift in a culture’s worldview, that is, a shift in the way culture perceives, or rather constructs, its reality; and since expression reveals perception, the aesthetic form of a period will reveal that period’s vision of reality, its paradigm” (28).

In such a shift, the potential for tragedy is diminished; Craige points out that tragedy requires

an absolute source of significance beyond the immediate to order and give fixed value to human events. Furthermore it requires the vision of man fallen into consciousness, man who is subjectively aware of the distance between his present reality and an ideal reality not to be achieved, who assumes responsibility for his actions, who has a linear sense of time and a knowledge of time’s irreversibility, who knows he goes inevitably towards his death and therefore seeks some transcendent meaning for the pain of his life (30).

How then does Pirandello employ this new monist paradigm in *Henry IV* and what does this shift offer the reader/theatre-maker/audience member when it comes to a treatment of time?

Furthermore, in spite of Craige’s assertions about the nature of tragedy, is there something tragic at work, if not in the classical sense, then perhaps more colloquial?

Ultimately, the analyses that this thesis puts forth are concerned with Pirandello’s scripted drama. While it is my intention to establish how his dramaturgy of time is of seminal importance in 20th- and even 21st-century drama and theatre, I do not intend to offer blanket assumptions about the field. Nonetheless, Pirandello’s written drama, like most, is written with the presupposition that it will be performed and that such a performance will transpire across time and in space. That Pirandello’s speaks to a relativistic perspective in his drama does not alter this principle aspect of dramatic writing and theatrical performance.
But, the relativity that this analysis intends to address is one that is a basic scientific tenet: That objects cannot move through space without the passage of time (Lightman 60). Even this assertion comes with the caveat in that there is no absolute frame of rest against which all motion can be judged. Disregarding a cosmic frame of reference (the ether), Einstein instead offers up the following:

> We have to take into account that all our judgments in which time plays a part are always judgments of simultaneous events. If, for instance, I say “That train arrives here at 7 o’clock,” I mean something like this: “[The pointing of the small hand of my watch to 7 and the arrival of the train are simultaneous events” ("Electrodynamics" 73).

But, how does this observation about simultaneity get us any closer to the role of time in Henry IV? Madness here, too, is much more than a plot device. Henry’s illness and subsequent return to sanity undermine the frames of reference against which motion might be judged if we substitute physical motion instead for the development of a person’s identity and personal history across time. Even if we proceed on the assumption that theatre is, in part, constructed of time and space, we might stretch beyond a strictly scientific understanding of either of these terms and the dimensions they represent. This is why relativity offers up not only a scientific basis for the reinterpretation of reality but a philosophical one as well.

When we speak of the relativity of personal experience in Pirandello's work, we do not really refer to moving bodies in space. Instead, we deal with the relationships that Pirandello's characters have to one another and the perspective each has on their individual circumstances. The Six Characters, particularly the Father and Stepdaughter, each claim their own recollections of the events of the narrative are the most valid interpretation. They judge their actions and the overall story not with an objective sense of right or wrong—the dualist perspective that gives tragedy and the realistic social dramas their meaning—but in a way that privileges the individual perspective of the character, who places him or herself at the center of the story. Likewise in
Henry IV, Henry's frame of reference (the thing that would provide intelligibility) is markedly different from that of his visitors. They bear with them a sense of continuity that covers their transition from youth to middle-age. Henry has no such experience, growing old all at once when he returns to sanity and sees his grey hair.

Einstein’s work on special relativity sets out with the assumption that “every description of events in space involves the use of a rigid body to which such events have been referred” (Einstein Relativity 12) using the extended metaphor of a train moving along an embankment to demonstrate the principles that govern the mechanics of moving objects in space and time. Space and position in classical mechanics each have too vague a definition to suit Einstein’s purpose; instead, he speaks of a “system of coordinates” (introduce earlier), writing that “in order to have a complete description of the motion, we must specify how the body alters its position with time…” (Relativity 13-14).

But, the most significant aspect of special relativity for the purpose of this analysis is the relationship of the object in motion to the referent against which that motion is observed and evaluated. Motion is always observed in relation to a body or frame of reference that does not move (Relativity 13). The object in motion must always have a referent; otherwise, any claims made about its position or time in motion are meaningless. The metaphorical impact of relativity outside of the sciences is a key part of not only Pirandello’s work but is also a significant aspect of the modernist rejection of realism. A body in motion can only be evaluated with respect to a rigid referent, but how can we translate this scientific perspective into an aesthetic position?64 In

64 Before proceeding, another note on terminology is necessary. Pirandello’s work, and in particular Henry IV, offers some possible points of entry into question of relativity as an aesthetic as well as scientific position. I will not refer to the relationship between object and referent as a dichotomy or duality for two reasons: 1) those terms imply a conceptual opposition, rather than the mutual dependence of object and referent in the description of motion that Einstein’s theory offers implicitly, and 2) the dichotomy/duality of life and form in Pirandello is itself an important aspect of his artistic and theoretic output, and using either of these terms may be too confusing to the reader.
any case, modernism in general, and Pirandello’s work in particular, each offer characters and predicaments which can be evaluated against a larger backdrop, but without the social or moral recommendations of the realist stage. For Pirandello, the life/form duality is at the very least the macrocosm against which we can understand his dramaturgy.

In this evaluation of relativity, time is important, but it will take a few mental gymnastics to get to an aesthetic treatment of the topic through the lens of relativism. As a point of entry into the problem, let us turn momentarily to scenography in *Henry IV*, where the principles of relativity lay the foundations of their impact in key metaphorical ways.

As was established previously, drama is written largely, though not exclusively, with the presupposition that it will be performed—an event that happens across time and in space. But in *Henry IV*, time and space are themselves under scrutiny. The opening notes on the scenic design speak to this, as does the juxtaposition of medieval and modern settings, objects, and clothing styles in the initial moments of the play, and key scenes that follow.

Pirandello’s initial comments on the setting (and the resulting visual impact) give immediate insight into the strange juxtaposition of timeframes and historical periods. The salon in which the opening scene takes place is described as follows: “Salon in the villa, furnished and decorated so as to look exactly like the throne room of Henry IV in the royal residence at Goslar. Among the antique decorations, there are two life-size portraits in oil painting” (Pirandello *Henry IV* 139). The Romanesque-style decor juxtaposed with the modern oil paintings immediately speaks to the difficulty of fitting Pirandello into any of the literary or dramatic genres of the late 19th- and early 20th-centuries, as well to a break from realist convention to

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65 Salone nella villa rigidamente parato in modo da figurare quella che potè essere la sala del trono di Enrico IV nella casa imperiale di Goslar. Ma in mezzo agli antichi arredi due grandi ritratti a olio moderni […] (*Enrico IV* 2463).
which Pirandello and his contemporary modernists were responding (Gillette 56). Pirandello’s work, and the worlds he creates onstage (across his output, not just in *Henry IV*), “[employs] the illusionistic vestige and yet insistent reality of realism to achieve the ontologically questioning spirit of the avant-garde” (56). The realist and naturalist movements of the mid-late 19th-century, in broad strokes, try to show the world as it really is—not only through scenography, but also through the actions and manner of speech of its characters. The anti-realist movements of the early 20th-century offered an interpretation of the world that took into account the unseen psychological or emotional aspects which might influence behavior (e.g. expressionism or surrealism), or art which embraced chaos over logic (e.g. DADA). In the shift from realism to the early scenography of *avanguardia*, scenography became the point of contact between physical space and psychological states, and these “anti-realist avant-gardes of the twentieth century […] formed their identities through a conscious and deliberate break with realistic representation in pursuit of the mysteries bound up with perception and representational thought itself” (56).

If observations, according to the theory of Special Relativity, depend both on the position of the observer, and the frame of reference against which the object in question is observed, then it stands to reason that emerging theatrical trends and movements might be evaluated with respect to preceding trends and movements. Relativism is not simply a scientific theory or a characteristic of Pirandello’s *oeuvre*; it is bound up in the ways we think and write about the past, and how we fashion new ideas from established trends. Henry’s Romanesque villa might be a suitable place to stage a coherent historical drama if not for the modern oil paintings; likewise, the modern oil-paintings might be a noteworthy addition to a set that is more in keeping with the tastes of the period in which they were painted. But, at first glance, and disregarding for a moment any knowledge of the play’s content or resolution, it becomes difficult to evaluate
these entities in relation to one another; what is the object, and what is its frame of reference?

What does it mean to switch these roles?

The play doubles this ambiguity in the role of Henry. Henry’s madness is set in stark contrast against the apparent sanity of his visitors. In the visitors, Pirandello puts forth figures whose lives are characterized by a relatively fluid concept of their development as individuals. They are able to recall the events leading up to the masquerade in which the protagonist was injured and his subsequent two decades in isolation. However, these recollections do not provide the foundation for an absolutely correct account of the events of the pageant. Instead, each member of the party has his or her version of the story:

DONNA MATILDE: And I gave him this portrait of me without very much regret…since his mother… (Indicates Di NOLLI)

DOCTOR: You don’t remember if it was he who asked for it?

DONNA MATILDE: Ah, that I don’t remember…Maybe it was his sister, wanting to help out…

DOCTOR: One other thing: was it his idea, this pageant?

BELCREDI: (at once) No, no, it was mine!

DOCTOR: If you please…

DONNA MATILDE: Don’t listen to him. It was poor Belassi’s idea

BELCREDI: Belassi! What had he got to do with it?

DONNA MATILDE: Count Belassi, who died, poor fellow, two or three months after…

BELCREDI: But if Belassi wasn’t there when…

DI NOLLI: Excuse me, Doctor; but is it really necessary to establish whose the original idea was?

DOCTOR: It would help me, certainly! (Henry IV 154-155)66

66 DONNA MATILDE: E questo mio, come le ho detto, io lo cedetti – senza poi tanto rincrescimento – perché sua madre… (accenna di nuovo al Di NOLLI.)

DOTTORE: Non sa se fu lui a richiederlo?

DONNA MATILDE: Ah, non so! Forse... O fu la sorella, per assecondare amorosamente...

DOTTORE: Un’altra cosa, un’altra cosa! L’idea della cavalcata venne a lui?

BELCREDI: (subito): No no, venne a me! venne a me!

DOTTORE: Prego...

DONNA MATILDE: Non gli dia retta. Venne al povero Belassi.

BELCREDI: Ma che Belassi!

DONNA MATILDE: (al DOTTORE) Il conte Belassi, che morì, poverino, due o tre mesi dopo.

BELCREDI: Ma se non c’era Belassi, quando...

DI NOLLI: (seccato dalla minaccia di una nuova discussione) Scusi, dottore, è proprio necessario stabilire a chi venne l’idea?

DOTTORE: Eh sì mi servirebbe... (Enrico IV 2470).
The discussion of who came up with the pageant in which Henry was thrown from his horse is a direct indication of the importance relativity plays in Pirandello’s drama. All versions of the story are perhaps equally valid in this case, and ultimately, it does not matter whose idea it was (and cannot really help Doctor Genoni, who is largely implied to be a quack by the time the play concludes). Ultimately, each of these accounts of the pageant’s origin serves as another vantage point for the individual characters as they look back the developments of their lives and the illness which afflicted Henry. Each of these stories remind the audience of the points of origin for these characters; present at the pageant, they were, for better or for worse, inextricably bound up with the story of Henry’s madness, his discontinuity tied up in their continuity.

This continuity is hinted at in the resemblance of Frida to her Mother, the Marchioness Matilda Spina, particularly with respect to the painting of the young Matilda:

FRIDA: Ah, your portrait
DONNA MATILDA: No, no…look again; it’s you, not I, there!
DI NOLLI: Yes, it’s quite true. I told you so, I…
DONNA MATILDA: But I never would have believed it! (Shaking as it with a chill) What a strange feeling it gives one! (Then looking at her daughter) Frida, what’s the matter? (She pulls her to her side, and slips an arm around her waist.) Come: don’t you see yourself in me there? (Henry IV 150)

What can be inferred from the stage directions and dialogue, and as Kyle Gillette rightly notes, is that the painting of the young Matilda is to be modelled on the actress playing Frida (Gillette 65). But, more than simply give weight to the line in which Matilda asserts her daughter

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67 DI NOLLI: Sì, è vero? Ve lo dicevo io
DONNA MATILDE: Ma non avrei mai creduto tanto! (Scotendosi come per un brivido alla schiena) Dio, che senso! (Poi, guardando la figliuola) Ma come, Frida? (Se la stringe accanto, cingendole con un braccio la vita) Vieni! Non ti vedi in me, tu, là? (Enrico IV 2468).

68 This instance, is of course another in the numerous acts of doubling that make Henry IV such a rich text. Not only do questions of identity play out in the words and actions of the protagonist, but among the set pieces and props as well. Who is, really, the subject of the painting—the young Matilda (a character) or the actress playing Frida (a real person)? The answer is a bit a moving target and while it relies in part on the context and use of the painting
resemblance to herself twenty years ago, these paintings call to mind the fluid, inexorable progression of time itself. As Gillette observes,

Matilda […] develops a strong fascination with her image of twenty years before. For while the portrait has remained still, she has changed; she has aged and begotten a daughter (Frida) who now bears an uncanny likeness to the portrait that once looked like her. […] The portraits contain within them the liminal site of generational time, linking the past and the present in an overdetermined collaboration between a scenic element and the actors’ bodies (61-62).

Matilda visualizes herself and her daughter against the referential frame of twenty years; her youth faded but is recovered, somewhat, in her daughter.

These examples, while simplistic with respect to the central themes of the play, demonstrate the pervasive quality of Pirandello’s relativity; it is one of the recurring themes of this play and, more broadly, of his best-loved and most studied works. But, these initial moments, while they establish the characters’ shared (if inconsistently recollected) history, are not the heart of the play. Again, madness takes center stage, so to speak. Pirandello’s relativism, when juxtaposed with the protagonist’s madness, recovery, and subsequent performance of his madness, show just how unstable our understanding of reality can be. Just as in Einstein’s theory of relativity, the very substance of reality and the nature of time (by which we evaluate change in reality) are under scrutiny in Pirandello’s play.

But, scenography, as Gillette characterizes it, is only one aspect of Pirandello’s evaluation of the human condition in Henry. While scenography does offer a fitting point of contact between physical space and psychological states, as Gillette asserts, the dramatic character (specifically Henry) is the means by which we can access and appreciate the relationship

(i.e., in a performance, it is a painting of Matilda, in storage it just as well may be a painting of a young actress), privileging one interpretation does not necessarily erase the possibility of another.
between the outer world, and inner space of one’s self, using relativism as the key to that understanding.

If all dramas, when performed, are composed largely of time and space, character becomes the third element, a point of view on, and into, the story. As Pirandello demonstrated in *Six Characters*, every character in a story (at least in Pirandello’s view) carries with him or her a singular outlook on the story and on how he or she figures into its progression. When we examine at a story from the point of view of different character, we ultimately change the meaning and potential impact which it may offer.

*Henry IV* offers up a unique challenge in this regard. Relativism, especially that following the influence of Einstein, offers up a consideration of reality in which “time and space are relative to the place of the observer, absolute time and absolute distance do not exist, [and] there is no absolute frame of reference, that time and space form a continuum” (Craigie 16). By adopting this understanding of the reality as not only a scientific principle but also as an aesthetic framework, the particular genius of *Henry IV* begins to reveal itself. Like its dramatic forebear *Six Characters*, *Henry IV* opens the possibility of multiple stories (the "mad" protagonist, the aged love interest, her put-upon daughter, the quack doctor, etc.) offering up dramatic figures who stand in and deal with the primary problem that Pirandello sees at work in human relationships and experience: the inability to think of one another (and one another’s experiences) as an additional possible truth, rather than as points of contention between people that must be vetted and verified. However, *Henry IV* departs from its predecessor in that there is not one character championing himself or herself as a victim, or hero, or narrative center. In *Six Characters*, four of the Characters tag along because they are bound to each other and to the Father and Stepdaughter by the whims of the author who rejected them. In *Henry IV*, almost
everyone has their own recollections of the past, motives for being present, and opinions on the current situation.

However, the visitors’ perspective on the situation comes from the sense of coherence which the story (and its creator Pirandello) affords them. Einstein’s work on relativity considers, in part, the relationships between moving bodies, and though Einstein’s work brings into focus the potential the quantum mechanics holds for scientific inquiry, he does not dispense with the historical trajectory of scientific thought, writing “the purpose of [classical] mechanics is to describe how bodies change their position in space with ‘time’” (Relativity 13). There is a deceptive simplicity of the terms “time” and “space” and the multitude of associations that they can call to mind—necessitating that Einstein’s terminological preference for “system of co-ordinates” in place of “body of reference” (Relativity 13). Even so, the relationship between character and story might nonetheless be borne out in a way analogous to that of an object moving in space.

Can madness be a frame of reference against which the actions of the characters and the nature of their personal and shared history might be evaluated? After all, even though the visitors to the villa each brings with them their own versions of the events that led to Henry’s injury, all these positions are equally valid as previously stated. Moreover, the play’s dialogue sets them up in opposition to the predicament that befell the protagonist. The trajectory of each character’s individual history and the relationships they have with one another give meaning and definition to the individual figures, and also set up their shared history with that of Henry’s, whose own history has, through no fault of his own, significantly diverged from that of his visitors.

But, we might say the same for Henry, evaluating the conditions and behaviors against the aspects of the other characters which perhaps correspond more readily to everyday
experience. In this way, madness and sanity each resist the mantle that would permit them to serve as the frame of reference for this analysis of the play as a whole and the metaphorical motion of the characters through the time and space of the play (though for the purposes of setting up sanity and madness in relation to each other, they admirably fulfill those roles).

So, if madness and/or sanity fail in this attempt to define a referential frame, there must be something to which this analysis can turn. Once again, *Henry IV* proves itself to be a logical extension of the work begun with *Six Characters in Search of an Author*. Aside from the formal, thematic, and aesthetic choices of the dramatist, the narrative context itself that Pirandello provides for us makes it possible to understand the relationship of the characters to each other and to time. Unlike Pirandello’s Six Characters, who are presented as aware of their constructed quality, the characters of *Henry IV*, while they are characters, are not conscious of their fundamentally fictitious nature. This is particularly appropriate, since Pirandello, in providing these particular entities with a narrative context, offers up a world with clear boundaries to contain it. But, even within these boundaries, there is an expansive range of possibilities (by way of an example, we might look to the disparate stories of the pageant’s conception).

In this way, I understand the dramatic narrative of *Henry IV* itself to be the frame of reference against which Pirandello’s sets his microcosm of human experience and through which he extends the temporal features of his dramaturgy first explored in *Six Characters*, with madness as the key to this treatment. Henry’s particular manifestation of madness, the quality which marks him as “other” with respect to his visitors and attendants, cannot itself be a frame of reference. Only in retrospect, that is, upon emerging from insanity, is Henry able to understand and give meaning to his injury and subsequent absence from the world—an absence with physical, intellectual, and metaphorical implications.
Madness understood in relation to (and as the antithesis of) sanity or wellness serves as a fitting analogue to play-acting, which colloquially might be set against what is conventionally understood as realness or truth. Madness and play-acting (and the eventual play-acting of madness) highlight the particularly difficult relationship Henry has to time, which is where the structure of narrative (as a frame) comes into play. Without retreating too much to Heidegger’s characterization “world” or “worldhood” what Pirandello presents is a profound insight into the development of an individual’s personality and self-understanding in relationship to the contextualizing forces which govern their actions, presented on a microcosmic scale in *Henry IV*, juxtaposing figures whom we can understand as possessing a continuity of self with an individual from whom continuity had been withheld. Simply put, the visitors who come to the villa at the beginning of the play, even with their disparate recollections of the past, can nonetheless fit those recollections into a life history, each giving a largely continuous understanding of their development and growth as a person and allowing them to recount a version of the story that effectively gets them from the events of the pageant to their visit. For Henry, there is nothing of the sort. His visitors have a frame of reference for their whole lives, from when they were young to when they are now middle-aged; each one is the protagonist of the story that makes up his or her life. Henry, on the other hand, is primarily a collection of events which make no sense. At one moment, he was a young man in a costumed parade. At the next, he was an old man, again in costume, with nothing to account for the intervening years. Being an assemblage of events and plot points, with no narrative structure to give them order, he instead adopts this as his way of being, positioning himself as a character à la the Six Characters, lacking a context that would provide him with the continuous self-understanding.

The idea of character is, however, a troubling notion with respect to Henry, since realistically we can’t separate the protagonist of *Henry IV* from the events of the play; we can
outline all of the features that would identify him as Henry, but who he is (beyond a middle-aged man dressed as a medieval German monarch) and what he does are inextricably linked. 

Pirandello’s characters (the Six Characters as well as Henry) all bear the marks of their creation as dramatic characters and as the “spoken action” that Pirandello called for in 1899. As the Father of the Six Characters notes, “the drama is in us, and we are the drama” (Six Characters 219). The story is likewise within Henry, and he is himself the story of his madness and bears upon himself the marks of being born into madness and then reborn into sanity (and middle-age). The Six Characters were ever conscious of their status as characters (the problem of their being rejected characters, less so); likewise, Henry recognizes himself as having been fashioned into something against his desires—to have been made mad, and then to suffer from the ramifications of knowing so; to understand the “sad privilege: that of feeling [himself] alive”—a feeling that the Six Characters bear with them, and which, for Pirandello, has literary roots in his protagonist Mattia Pascal (The Late Mattia Pascal 155). Even though Henry adopts a historical framework in which he can develop the character, Henry’s play is more about the events of his own life rather than that of the monarch.

Like the Six Characters, Henry’s experience resists intelligibility. Henry’s visitors cannot appreciate the complexity of experience or the depth of his loss; Henry can’t possibly re-integrate himself into the world of his visitors and the social order in which engage. The Six Characters seem themselves diminished in the work of the actors and a theatre space which cannot accommodate characters whose stories happen all at once and forever. The world that Henry might possibly return to with Belcredi, Matilda and the others likewise cannot be fit for a

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69 IL DIRETTORE: E dov’è il copione? 
IL PADRE: È in noi, signore. (Gli Attori ridono) Il dramma è in noi; siamo noi; e siamo impazienti di rappresentarlo, così come dentro ci urge la passione (Sei personaggi 109).
man who at once knows what it means to be both mad and sane. While the character that Henry presents is not that of the historical king, but rather the character of a man who, in his insanity, believes himself to be the Holy Roman Emperor Henry IV, his visitors only see an individual who is truly mad. The self-understanding that Henry must develop under the conditions of this sane-madness are withheld from his visitors (and likewise from the audience, for whom these visitors stand in place). In short, Henry’s story makes sense only to himself, and he exists at the center of it. Even if we can point to the actions or recollections of the other characters in the play as having made some contribution to the state of affairs, ultimately, Henry’s drama is just that—his own—and his final confrontation with Belcredi the only logical reparation for the injustice leveled against Henry twenty years ago. Ultimately, Henry approaches the realm of Character by resisting being understood in terms of the context of his peers—the frame of reference—that would make his story and his self-understanding intelligible to others, but would also limit the ways in which he could interpret himself.

With respect to time and relativity, it is hard to account for time in madness, especially if the manifestation of madness that characterizes Henry seems to withhold a typical forward-moving understanding of time’s flow. Time is not really something that can be understood in and of itself, as we have seen already in the preceding accounts for Bergson, Husserl, and Heidegger. For Einstein, time and space form a continuum and make up a reality which relies upon the interdependence of both. In this understanding of reality, time does not stand alone as some unyielding constant but instead finds its essence in the idea of simultaneity, a concept which is at the heart of all statements and observations made about physical phenomena. As far back as 1906, Einstein was outlining the role and purpose of simultaneity in scientific observation, offering the following definition: “The ‘time’ of an event is that which is given simultaneously with the event by a stationary clock located at the place of the event, this clock
being synchronous, and indeed synchronous for all time determinations, with a specified stationary clock” (Einstein "Electrodynamics" 74). But, there can be no absolute significance to the phenomena of simultaneity; instead “two events which, viewed from a system of co-ordinates, are simultaneous, can no longer be looked upon as simultaneous events when envisaged from a system which is in motion relative to that system” (Relativity 76).

So, how can simultaneity fill out this understanding of Pirandello’s dramaturgy of time in conjunction with the relativism in Pirandello’s work? Simultaneity already plays an important, if understated role, in Henry IV. Implicitly, during the period of protagonist’s madness (and the self-imposed exile of sane-madness) the other characters were going about their lives, getting married, having children, etc. These individual trajectories have no ultimate significance when considered individually, but read in conjunction, the tragedy of Henry’s life is all the more apparent, as Henry progressed on a rather abnormal scale when compared to the more conventional aspects of the visitors’ lives. As previously noted with his example of the stone, Einstein takes great care to explain that an “independently existing trajectory” does not exist (Relativity 14). In considering the metaphorical implications of relativity in relation to Henry IV and complex relationship between character and story, it is safe to say that while Pirandello writes Henry believing himself as having found freedom in his sane-madness, the trajectory of his story can only be understood when we are mindful of the roles his visitors play.

6 The Theatre Reconsidered: Tonight We Improvise

Henry IV represents a major development in Pirandello’s dramaturgy of time. Picking up both thematically and chronologically where Six Characters left off, this second play under consideration offers a fitting continuation of the work of its predecessor. Taken individually, the four analyses presented here each offers a suitable point of entry into the play and its
complicated treatment of time. But, to privilege one approach over the others is misguided. Ultimately, Pirandello was not only exploring the possibilities (or limitations) of theatre and drama, but was working at the intersection of established and emerging ideas, not just about time, but of the very foundations of reality, the process of personal experience, and the essence of what it means to be. Time cannot be extracted from these concepts but is instead inextricably linked with them. But, by turning the focus of discussion to time, it is possible to understand how space, experience, and the creative process are all mutually dependent upon time.

Tonight We Improvise, the last play of this study will prove the breadth and depth of Pirandello’s development as a theatre artist. Following the successes of Six Characters and Henry IV, as well as four years as capocomico of the Teatro d’Arte, Pirandello would again return to an explicit consideration of theatrical creation and practice. As the next chapter will demonstrate, Tonight We Improvise reflects upon this period of growth, identifying time and space as two key components of theatre and performance and rejecting Pirandello’s youthful notion of theatre’s inferiority to the literary arts.
Chapter 4

_Tonight We Improvise_ and Limits of Representation

While _Tonight We Improvise_ bears similarities in style and content to Pirandello’s theatre plays from the early 1920s, it was written and produced following establishment, and subsequent dissolution, of his company, the Teatro d’Arte. This marks _Tonight We Improvise_ as emerging from (and serving as a culmination of) a collection of fundamentally different experiences which prompted his previous dramatic explorations of the artist’s process, the origin of the character, and theatre-making in general. The earliest of Pirandello’s theatre plays, _Six Characters in Search of an Author_, explored the limits that the production process imposed on a creative impulse or text, but _Tonight We Improvise_, occupying a place in Pirandello’s output that follows a period of considerable writing and production for the theatre, instead interrogates the “possibilities of representations” (Santeramo 100, my translation).\(^\text{70}\)

Even so, this relatively optimist treatment of the theatre does not dispense with the questions and concerns which are bound up in Pirandello’s dramaturgy of time. In the preceding chapters, the primacy of the body it occupies as it moves through time (Bergson), the continuity of impressions as they are experienced and recede into the past (Husserl), the role of time in the individuals’ understanding of self and authentic being (Heidegger) and the relativistic models of physics that demonstrate how the flow of time is not uniform (Einstein) have all provided a means of access into the temporal dimension of Pirandello’s work, and will largely continue to do in his final theatre play. But as hinted above, while the two previously discussed plays were works of Pirandello’s chronological maturity, they remain rooted in an understanding of the

\(^{70}\)“È importante ricordare che Pirandello compone i due drammi citati [Sogno (ma forse no) e Questa sera si recita a soggetto] contemporaneamente, tra il dicembre del 1928 e il gennaio del 1929, e che l’indagine intorno alla possibilità della rappresentazione costituisce un aspetto essenziale di entrambi i lavori” (Santeramo 100).
theatre that does not necessarily account for the peculiarities of the production process. *Tonight We Improvise* is, therefore, a substantially different play, more nuanced in its treatment of the theatre and those who make it. As Santeramo suggests, Pirandello’s practical experience as the *capocomico* of the Teatro d’Arte redefined his understanding of the particular conditions of theatrical creation (62), and the playwright’s growth as an artist and philosopher leaves its indelible mark on the final play of this study. It is this maturity and growth that also denotes *Tonight We Improvise* as the culmination of Pirandello’s professional and artistic life of the 1920s, and as such, shares the playwright’s fascination with the dramaturgy of time, but in much more nuanced and subtle ways.

1 The Role of the Body in *Tonight We Improvise*

Still, *Tonight We Improvise* is not a wholly new kind of work in Pirandello’s *oeuvre*. The previous chapters have demonstrated that the body (especially the actor’s body) has a central place in Pirandello’s dramaturgy, and *Tonight We Improvise* reinforces this centrality. From the outset, the body is one of the chief objects of concern in the play. The arrogant Dr. Hinkfuss’ blustering introductory remarks to the audience may suggest his considerable command over the work accomplished in the theatre on the evening of the performance, but the actors (and their bodies) are not negated by this claim, and each member of the company occupies not only the space of the stage but a role in the story and the progression in the evening’s events. It is this consideration of the body that will again prompt the analysis of the dramaturgy of time in the last play. In fact, it is the relationship between bodies that introduces us to the difficult circumstances in which Hinkfuss has put his company, when, Hinkfuss and the Leading Actor, having been drawn into an argument in front of the full auditorium about the evening’s plan and the former’s apparent disrespect for the (presumably well-known) latter, are interrupted when a
slap sounds from behind the curtain. The Character Actor and the Character Actress have just been rehearsing a fight:

**DR. HINKFUSS:** *(peering through the green curtain)* What the devil's happening now? Can something else be wrong?

**THE CHARACTER ACTOR:** *(coming out from behind the green curtain, his hand still nursing his cheek. Dressed up as SAMPOGNETTA)* Just this - that I will not stand for Miss — *(The name of THE CHARACTER ACTRESS)* with the mere excuse she's improvising to haul off and slap me so hard. You must have heard it. It has among other things— *(He unveils his cheek.)* ruined my makeup.

**THE CHARACTER ACTRESS:** *(coming out dressed and made up as SIGNORA IGNAZIA)* Good heavens. Why not withdraw and try not to get hit by me? My slap was just a perfectly instinctive gesture.

**THE CHARACTER ACTOR:** And how do I shelter myself from you if you hit me suddenly and without notice?

**THE CHARACTER ACTRESS:** Whenever you deserve it, dear.

**THE CHARACTER ACTOR:** All right, but I have no way of knowing when I'm going to deserve it.

**THE CHARACTER ACTRESS:** Then you'll always have to be on guard because you're going to always be in need of a good whack or two. And, if one is really improvising, I cannot, after all, slap you at some moment decided on in advance.

**THE CHARACTER ACTOR:** But there's no need to really hit me!

**THE CHARACTER ACTRESS:** And just what should I do then? Pretend to hit you? I haven't a written part to play. My lines come from here *(She makes a gesture from the stomach up.)* and I do not stand on ceremony, understand? You'll grab at me, and I'll let you have it.

**DR. HINKFUSS:** Ladies and gentlemen, ladies and gentlemen, not here in front of the audience, please.

**THE CHARACTER ACTRESS:** We're already in our parts, Dr. Hinkfuss.

**THE CHARACTER ACTOR:** *(putting his hand again to his cheek)* You said it! *(Tonight We Improvise 474)*

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71 *IL DOTTOR HINKFUSS:* *(guardando di là dalla tenda sul palcoscenico)* Ma che diavolo avviene? Che altro c'è?

*IL VECCHIO ATTORE BRILLANTE:* *(venendo fuori dalla tenda con una mano sulla guancia, vestito e truccato da SAMPOGNETTA)* C'è che non tollero che la signora... *(dirà il nome dell'ATTRICE CARATTERISTA)* con la scusa che recita a soggetto, m'appicchici certi schiaffi (ha sentito?) che tra l'altro (gli mostra la guancia schiaffeggiata) m'ha rovinato il trucco, no?

*L'ATTRICE CARATTERISTA:* *(venendo fuori, vestita e truccata da SIGNORA IGNAZIA)* Ma lei se ne ripari, santo cielo! Ci vuol poco a ripararsene! È un moto istintivo e naturale.

*IL VECCHIO ATTORE BRILLANTE:* E come faccio a ripararmene, se lei me li tira così all'improvviso?

*L'ATTRICE CARATTERISTA:* Quando se li merita, cara signora! E io, se si recita a soggetto, non posso tirarglieli a un punto segnato!

*IL VECCHIO ATTORE BRILLANTE:* Già! Ma quando me li merito io non lo so, cara signora!

*L'ATTRICE CARATTERISTA:* E allora se ne ripari sempre, perché per me se li merita sempre. E io, se si recita a soggetto, non posso tirarglieli a un punto segnato!

*IL VECCHIO ATTORE BRILLANTE:* Non c'è però bisogno che me li tiri per davvero!

*L'ATTRICE CARATTERISTA:* E come allora, per finta? Io non ho mica una parte a memoria: deve venire da qui *(fa un gesto dallo stomaco in su)* e andar tutto per le spicce, sa? Lei me li strappa, e io glieli do.
At the outset, it might appear unclear as to what this selection might have to do with time. It does not overtly reference time or temporality; instead, the focus of the exchange is in the body, and still, it is this emphasis on corporeality that offers a point of departure for the analysis of this final play in this study.

The play begins with and is often interrupted by occurrences that give primacy to the actor’s body within the both the progression of the evening’s events and in the creative process. This first overt reference to the body and to corporeality—the slap between the Character Actor and the Characters Actress—speaks to the peculiarities of creating a role within the boundaries of theatrical practice. It is, if not an outright deceptive moment, at least a nuanced commentary on the necessity of a theatrical apparatus. The slap denotes the multiplicities that might be identified in the theatrical event—not simply the duality of actor/character\(^\text{72}\), set/location, costume/clothing, or any number of things which stand-in for other things in order to create the environment in which the performance/story transpires, but also the duality of product and process itself. So when Pirandello includes a moment like this, he requests more from the audience than simply the willful suspension of disbelief; Pirandello highlights the dynamic “doing” that is the theatre, especially visible in these moments that have (or that allude to) physical demands, in which both the preparatory process and the moment that results are less distinct, and indicate both an authentic creative force and an intentionally manufactured creation

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\(^{72}\) In fact, Pirandello goes so far as to call attention to the art of role playing that is at the heart of the actor’s craft, summoning the Leading Actor to the stage by the name of the actual actor who happens to be playing him in the performance (and leaving corresponding spaces in the text to insert that name), effectively eliminating the distance between actor and character that was the source of conflict in *Six Characters*, though the ramifications of this collapse become another source of difficulty later in the play.
(in that slightly, though unfortunately, pejorative sense, of the word “manufactured”). There is no reason to believe that a moment like this has not been rehearsed prior to the evening’s events—not in the context of the narrative the Pirandello’s text has set out for the performers, but rather in view of the process that takes a group of people from the decision to make a production of *Tonight We Improvise* and then, over time, actually getting around to doing it.

However, the second moment in this play that calls attention to corporeality comes near the conclusion, in which the Leading Actress, having taken on the role of Mommina in the inner play grows faint and experiences physical distress similar to that her character. It is an emotional moment for the character of Mommina and the company as a whole, as they struggle to properly assist the Leading Actress in her discomfort:

THE CHARACTER ACTRESS: *(pointing again to MOMMINA /THE LEADING ACTRESS] lying on the floor)* But why don't you get up, Miss—? She's still lying there.
THE CHARACTER ACTOR: She couldn't really be dead, could she? *(All gently bend down over THE LEADING ACTRESS.)*
THE LEADING ACTOR: *(calling to her and lifting her up)* Miss—
THE CHARACTER ACTRESS: Are you really sick?
NENÈ: Good God, she's fainted. Let's lift her up.
THE LEADING ACTRESS: *(getting up herself)* No-thank you. It really is my heart *(Tonight We Improvise 525).*

In this moment, the risk of the sort of theatre that Hinkfuss is pursuing become clear. The Character Actor and the Character Actress may have claimed to already be in their roles in their earlier exchange *(Tonight We Improvise 474)*, but they offer an only superficial understanding of

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73 L’ATTRICE CARATTERISTA: *(mostrando LA PRIMA ATTRICE ancora a terra)* Ma perché non s’alza la signorina?
Se ne sta ancora lì...
L’ATTORE BRILLANTE: Ohé, non sarà morta per davvero?
*(Tutti si chinano premurosi su LA PRIMA ATTRICE.)*
IL PRIMO ATTORE: *(chiamandola e scotendola)* Signorina... signorina...
L’ATTRICE CARATTERISTA: Sì sente male davvero?
NENÈ: Oh Dio, è svenuta! Solleviamola!
LA PRIMA ATTRICE: *(sollevandosi da sé col solo busto)* No... grazie... È il cuore, davvero... Mi lascino, mi lascino respirare... *(Questa Sera 2460).*
what the consequences of being so open to the experience of a character might be. The Leading Actress’ fainting spell and heart trouble speak instead to the concerns that the Six Characters have when seeing the theatre company attempt to embody their story. But, while the primary concern is that conventional theatrical practice cannot preserve the expansive, atemporal quality of their experience, Tonight We Improvise, speaks to the possibility that Characters, when inhabiting human bodies, are subject to the frailty and finitude of that body, and the temporal concerns that are wrapped up in those finite aspects.

The treatment of the duality of the Lead Actress/Mommina is altogether different from Pirandello’s previous works. The reader might reach back to earlier works to learn how tentatively the playwright began his exploration of the roles people play—both on stage and off. In his first full-length play, It is so (if you think so) (1918), the object is to get to the heart of the doubled role that Mrs. Ponza has adopted (as deceased first wife—Mrs. Frola’s daughter—and living the second wife to Mr. Ponza), a role which she defends in her only appearance at the play’s conclusion.\(^{74}\) We might even look back to Henry IV, in which the main character lives both as a mad and sane simultaneously, a doubling which breaks down only when he lets other in on the secret

But a key difference in these earlier works from Tonight We Improvise is that the reader and audience do not witness the breakdown of a body. In It is So..., it is the confusion and trepidation of the community towards Mrs. Ponza’s resistance to definition

\(^{74}\) Based on the 1917 short story La signora Frola e il signor Ponza suo genero (Mrs. Frola and Mr. Ponza, her son-in-law). It is so (If you think so) considers the identity of Mr. Ponza’s wife. Mr. Ponza insists his current wife is his second wife, and that the death of his first wife (Mrs. Frola’s daughter) resulted in Mrs. Frola’s madness and refusal to accept her daughter’s death. Mrs. Frola, on the other hand, says that it is Mr. Ponza’s madness that is the source of the confusion, as her daughter was sent away and could only be welcomed back into her home if a second marriage ceremony between her and Mr. Ponza was performed. At the play’s conclusion, Mrs. Ponza appears to her family members and the gossiping townspeople to tell them she is happy being whatever identity Mrs. Frola or Mr. Ponza would ascribe to her, and that she is no one herself.
that is the source of drama, and in *Henry IV*, we see how a man’s life breaks down when the identity he has built for himself is in conflict with a more conventional ideal of what a person can and should be within a larger social context. In both works, bodies are contested—to whom do they belong and what roles and personalities can be attached to them? What happens to others when they are confronted with a body that is ostensibly all things at once? In *It is so (if you think so)* and *Henry IV*, the contested bodies survive the plays unscathed (mental faculties and social roles notwithstanding).

But, in *Tonight We Improvise*, Pirandello establishes circumstances in which the body of an actress, inhabited by her assigned character, suffers. The Lead Actress’ metamorphosis to Mommina may be understood, in some ways as a callback to the pure, unadulterated “spoken action” that Pirandello saw as the driver of dramatic dialogue, but in the moment of Mommina’s death and the Lead Actress’ on-stage fit, the necessity (and danger) of fitting that action to the stage becomes clear. The Six Characters resisted such confinement, and through that resistance, Pirandello is able to articulate his suspicions of the theatre. However, by the late 1920s and thanks to Pirandello’s experience having overseen his own company (Santeramo 62), the playwright has a greater insight into both what the strengths and weaknesses of the theatrical event are, and by extensions, what can and cannot be expected of the physical bodies and stage spaces/properties that are employed to build and maintain the world of a play for the audience. It is also, in a way, a confirmation of the suspicions of the theatre with which Pirandello, as a younger playwright with less practical experience imbued his drama: namely, that the confines of the stage and the limitations of the actors cannot accommodate the expansive, unmitigated spoken action that is unintelligible without the structuring devices of narrative. Only here, the power to contain is the theatre’s primary strength, not its fatal flaw.
It is then with *Tonight We Improvise*’s attention to corporeality laid out before us, that we return, briefly, to Bergson. Pirandello’s fascination with corporeality seems to speak, in part, to Bergson’s consideration of both the space the body occupies and the role it plays in perception. In particular, John C. Mullarkey points to the unusual place Bergson occupies between modernist and postmodernist treatments of the body, writing,

> The modernist conception places emphasis upon the body as it is lived in the world from the first-person perspective. With that it is seen to a large extent as a constant in a world of flux, an anchoring for our evanescent daily routines and a ground for our incorporeal mental activity. In stark contrast to this position, the [postmodernist] approach that Deleuze and others like him advocate views the body as the epitome of flux. Having no time for the first person point of view (or any notion of personhood for that matter), the body is seen instead as an anonymous site of wild Dionysian excess (340).

According to Mullarkey, the body, as conceived by Bergson, inhabits the space between these two conceptions, possessing a duality that is found in the body’s own subjectivity and self-perception as well as through its perception by others (345). In this way, we begin to see how Pirandello, who resists so many definitions and delimiters, navigates the continuum between the modernist and postmodernist body (even if the definition of the latter often refers to the second half of the 20th century). From the body of Mrs. Ponza in 1918, which is inscribed with the identities others choose to give her, to the Six Characters who can only be perceived through the efforts of other, self-perceiving bodies, to *Henry IV*, in which the protagonist is able to regulate, to an extent, how others perceive him, we finally arrive at a moment that the Six Characters or Henry could never achieve—the concretization of an otherwise unrealized, abstracted Character in the body of an actor and within the space of the stage. But, as was demonstrated in the events surrounding the Lead Actress/Mommina, there is an inherent precarity in this kind of moment, one that was hinted at in *Six Characters* and now finds fuller expression in this later work.
Yet, in spite of the fascination with corporeality (and its innate risks) with which *Tonight We Improvise* is heavily invested, Pirandello’s work, as previously demonstrated, is primarily concerned with the origin of, and the creative process which results in, a work of art. Bergson’s early work on time and duration highlights his methodological tendency towards dualism, juxtaposing mechanical clock time (with its artificial, homogenizing delimiters) with *durée*, which is grasped through intuition rather than scientific or mathematic measurements. The role of intuition in duration, and by extension perception, in general, would continue to be a key feature of Bergson’s contributions, and through this, we can begin to see how Pirandello’s drama offers a compelling perspective on creation of art and they ways in which it establishes its own, necessary boundaries—physically as well as temporally. “Spoken Action” (1899) and *L’umorismo* (1908) are among Pirandello’s most significant aesthetic statements and have been drawn upon heavily in the course of this thesis, but they were written well before his practical experience in the theatre. *Tonight We Improvise* does not wholly dispense with the concept of humor, but rather extends the possibilities of what humor can be. Moving beyond a single observer’s reflection upon his or her perception at the intersection of laughter and sympathy, Pirandello preserves the characteristic juxtaposition of disparate experiences or feelings that denotes humor and expresses them in the language, space and time of the theatre, marking the stage space as the site where an audience can bear witness to the consequences of allowing *l’azione parlata* to occupy the performance space or actor’s body directly. The cost of such an endeavor—that is, the imposition of incompatible ways of being without the tempering influences of a written script or theatrical convention—is born out in *Tonight We Improvise*, first farcically with the Character Actor and Character Actress, and then with a complicated mix of solemnity and urgency, as the enthralling transformation of the Lead Actress into Mommina, however brief, resolves into actual physical distress.
Tonight We Improvise moves well beyond the concepts of humor and spoken action, displaying a kind of maturity and nuance that can only really be attributed to Pirandello’s experience with his Teatro d’Arte. Tonight we Improvise, more than any other play in this study, represents a significant theoretical shift for Pirandello, investigating more fully than any of the theatre plays the point of contact between theory and practice and between inspiration and realization. The issue at hand is more expansive than the relationship between a character and the role of the actor’s body in realizing it, but rather how the spoken action that motivates a creative process is grasped and realized in its fullest and most authentic expression.

In looking towards Bergson for corroboration, we find that he offers no complete and “systematic theory of art” (Lorand 400). Ruth Lorand offers a tidy summation of Bergson’s thoughts on art, relying heavily on Bergson’s comments on the duality of order and disorder as a point of access into the question of what, and how, art is. For Bergson, art is neither order nor disorder, nor is it the meeting point between the two concepts. Instead, art stands as the “principal paradigm for [Bergson’s] peculiar type of order; it compels us to accept the fact that beside the intellectual, deterministic order there exists an order that does not allow for predictions” (403-404). Significantly, a substantial distance between Benedetto Croce (from whom Pirandello distances himself with his revisions to L’umorismo) and Bergson emerges out of this; Croce’s formula of “intuition equals expression” falls apart in light of the Bergsonian treatment of form and content (which cannot be separate from each other). Instead, for Bergson, the final product—the work of art—resists prediction, as Lorand notes, “[t]he final product of art—the thing’— is not a mere implementation of a pre-existing idea; if it were, the actual work could have been predicted” (405).

This begins to get us to the heart of Tonight We Improvise, which implies in its title that the evening will pursue something that is beyond the realm of predictability and that whatever is
let loose on the stage over the course of the event will remain elusive and outside the grasp of a
final form, or at the very least repeatability. Now, this is, of course, a boldfaced lie—the play is
fully scripted and the events, even the most traumatic and physically demanding ones, are set
forth by the playwright and should be rehearsed in advance of an actual performance of the play.

Yet, in the trajectory of Pirandello’s theatre career, *Tonight We Improvise* speaks to the
peculiar demands and limits of the dramatic arts. The spatial and temporal constraints that
prevented the Six Characters from being satisfied with the work of the actors make the theatre
event possible in *Tonight We Improvise*. Whereas the younger Pirandello decried the
conventions and constraints imposed upon the creative impulse by the verist stage, in *Tonight We
Improvise*, the audience witnesses the necessity of the theatrical apparatus and boundaries in
which it is made to function.

As with so many concepts and questions advanced by Bergson, art can be understood in
his examination of the tension between the intellect and intuition, and between time and space
(400). Resisting the implications of conventional measures of time, “Bergson considers
durational perception (intuition) as the reliable channel for comprehending the true nature of
things, whereas spatial (geometrical) thinking has only pragmatic values. Bergson does not
dismiss intellectual knowledge; he merely wishes to limit its range and redefine its scope” (401).
Furthermore, Bergson privileges intuition over intellect, identifying the relationship between the
two, like the flow of time, as asymmetrical. For Bergson, time only flows in one direction, and
intuition begets analysis75 (and never the other way around) (Bergson, cited in Lorand 407).

75 And similarly, humor.
Pirandello offers similar a treatment of time, creativity, and character in *Tonight We Improvise*. In the moments following the Leading Lady’s “actual” physical distress during her character’s climactic death, the company insists on written parts:

**THE CHARACTER ACTOR:** Of course, of course—if you really want us to live our roles, this is what happens. But get this, we aren’t here to do this kind of thing. We’re here to play written parts, memorized before hand, learned by heart. Don’t you think for a minute that every evening each of us is going to get out of his own skin like this—

**THE LEADING ACTOR:** We need the author (Pirandello *Tonight We Improvise* 525-526)

But, Hinkfuss gets the last word in, responding,

The author, no. Written parts, yes, if we must—just so they can for one moment be endowed with the life we alone can give them and—*[He turns to the audience]* without a repetition of this evening’s errors, for which I must beg—the audience’s forgiveness (*He bows*) (*Tonight We Improvise* 526).76

In this moment, the audience having just witnessed the violent process by which a creative impulse is wrestled into form, Pirandello allows Hinkfuss a brief moment of self-awareness. For Bergson, content and form are inextricably bound together (Lorand 406) and art is denoted by its borders and conventions (406). Unlike the unorganized spatial/geometrical orders that are denoted by boundaries which are intellectually imposed, artificial, and thusly open and changeable, “The borders of a work [of art] have to be determined by the nature of the components, not by an external purpose. […] A work of art, unlike a geometrical progression, cannot go forever or even create the impression that it can go forever without losing its meaning.

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76 L’ATTORE BRILANTE: Eh, sfido! Se vuole che si viva... Ecco le conseguenze! Ma noi non siamo qua per questo, sa! Noi siamo qua per recitare, parti scritte, imparate a memoria. Non pretendere mica che ogni sera uno di noi ci lasci la pelle!

IL PRIMO ATTORE: Ci vuole l’autore!

IL DOTTOR HINKFUSS: No, l’autore no! Le parti scritte, si, ma mai, perché riabbiano vita da noi, per un momento e... (rivolto al pubblico) senza più le impertinenze di questa sera, che il pubblico ci vorrà perdonare. (*Inchino*) (Pirandello *Questa Sera* 2460).
and value” (407). Yet it must necessarily be contained, so as to best express its “inner tendency” (407).

In *Tonight We Improvise*, the necessity for containment makes itself known amidst the chaos and confusion that dog the performance event (as Pirandello has written it) from the start. However, where Pirandello departs from Bergson is in the consequences that arise at the lack of containment—rather than a lack of meaning that Bergson identifies, catastrophe and trauma abound in the play. The intuitive creative impulse must be grasped by some sort of intellectual, analytical order, e.g., a script, if the theatre company has any hope for creating a meaningful work of dramatic art. Like humor, the movement of intuition to analysis is a fundamentally temporal process, and as such irreversible. It might even be worth noting that Pirandello’s evolution as a playwright is itself irreversible, as he arrives at an appreciation of the theatrical apparatus only after he has worked with it directly.

With respect to duration and intuition, it is evident for both Bergson and Pirandello that it is antithetical to speak in concrete terms. Bergson, in discussing these concepts in qualitative terms (as opposed to the spatializing and homogenizing measures imposed by science or mathematics) in *The Essai*, demonstrates how states of consciousness change ceaselessly, and imperceptibly, and in *Creative Evolution* shows how this ceaseless change can never be reversed, and how a particular state of consciousness can never be repeated, writing:

> Our past, then, as a whole, is made manifest to us in its impulse; it is felt in the form of tendency, although a small part of it only is known in the form of idea. From this survival of the past it follows that consciousness cannot go through the same state twice. The circumstances may still be the same, but they will act no longer on the same person, since they find him at a new moment of his history (*Creative Evolution* 5)

Pirandello too shows the creative impulse cannot be grasped in a work of art that is predictable and can be known from the outset of the artist’s task, undercutting the Crocean model in which
intuition equals expression. In *Tonight We Improvise*, The Lead Actress/Mommina’s moment of physical distress, in the context of a truly improvised performance, may represent a moment of heightened emotion, vulnerability, liveliness, or any number of otherwise indeterminate states that can only be known by the person undergoing the experience—the audience really can’t know what has transpired in the mind and body of the Lead Actress/Mommina.

But even so, that’s really not the point, and the fascination with corporeality in *Tonight We Improvise* stands as a cunning misdirect that wouldn’t resolve itself fully until 1934, when Pirandello penned his introduction to D’Amico’s *History of Italian Theatre*, defending the form against accusations of an archeologic tendency that results from attempting to preserve the vision and efforts of single writer (Pirandello "Introduzione" 25-26). Instead, what Pirandello has cleverly done, especially with *Tonight We Improvise*, is to show that the process of art-making is not finished when the writer puts down his pen. Art, and in particular, dramatic art, is altered and enriched upon at every new encounter. When Hinkfuss admits that, yes, maybe, the actors need a script (if not necessarily an author), the audience almost definitely knows, even just peripherally, that they already have one—it’s the script for *Tonight We Improvise*, and the work of art is renewed each time the script is interpreted in a performance, and from moment to moment within a performance. Improvised or not, once a performance of *Tonight We Improvise* occurs, it cannot be undone, and it is new and different each time because the very moment of the performance is new and different each time. Thus, *Tonight We Improvise* speaks as much about the life of a work of art as it does about the creative process. Pirandello, in embracing the theatrical apparatus, does not mitigate the potency of the lively impulse that inspires the artist but rather demonstrates how even in giving itself over to convention and intelligibility, it resists being fixed because it is always the result of a collaborative, ongoing, and fluid efforts.
Time-Consciousness, Experience, and the Role of the Audience

Like Bergson, Husserl had little to say that directly concerned aesthetics and art (Uzelac 7). However sparse his comments on the topic, particularly those of the dramatic arts, they speak volumes to Husserl’s phenomenological project and Pirandellian dramaturgy. Pirandello’s theatre plays concurrently address the limits and potentialities of representation, and the maturity with which *Tonight We Improvise* treats the subject speaks to the ways in which the division between theory and practice, and between inspiration and the completed work, become less and less distinct in the dramatic arts. For his career-long fascination with the creative process, Pirandello’s success is rooted in the ways in which his theoretical statements on the theatre and aesthetic of humor speak immediately to the unstable and precarious position of a person’s perception of him or herself, his or her relationships, and the world at large. In *Six Characters*, it was the ontological and epistemological impasse between the Characters and the Theatre Company that demonstrated the inherent violence of the creative act and the futility of trying to achieve mutual understanding. In *Henry IV*, the protagonist loses control when he allows others to see the complex methods by which he achieves self-understanding (and for a long time, self-preservation. As J.L. Styan summarizes Pirandello’s ingenuity and appeal thusly:

> Pirandello's plays may investigate the act of artistic creation, or the human personality, or the existence of the individual will, or the incidence of truth and reality, but his achievement as a playwright turns on his ability to make an audience experience these good things (96).

*Tonight We Improvise* is no different when it comes to the broad strokes that Styan paints of Pirandello’s theatre. Perhaps where this play differs is in its implication of the audience. The two previous plays discussed make no mention of the audience watching the performance, and the actual theatre patrons (that is, the ones who attend a performance of a Pirandello play, not the
obvious audience plants identified in the script as audience members or theatre staff) are treated as largely passive—not as invisible, but as not even present.\textsuperscript{77} *Henry IV* furthers this in its directions for a realistic-looking 12\textsuperscript{th}-century villa, which in effect turns out to be a large set piece, not only in that it is a setting for a production of *Henry IV*, but it is also the place in which the protagonist plays out his deception for nearly two decades. In any case, *Henry IV* is a play that, textually, and likely visually, drifts a bit closer to having the “fourth wall” of that naturalist stage more than any other play under consideration in this study.

However, the audience of *Tonight We Improvise* is not so far removed from the action of the production. That’s not to say that the play is written or can readily be interpreted in a participatory fashion, but rather that the presence of an audience is denoted as a necessity in the creation of a work of dramatic art (see Hinkfuss’s apology to the audience in the preceding section). Styan, in a footnote, identifies *Tonight We Improvise* as proof that “that Pirandello was capable of trying to deceive his audience totally” (101). As clever and cutting as Styan’s exceedingly brief assessment of the play might be, it’s a little unfair at best and outstandingly disingenuous at worst. Pirandello was not unaware of his tendency towards playfulness, inserting it as a throwaway gag in *Six Characters* when, prior to the entry of the Characters, the Actors complain about the incomprehensibility of the actual Pirandello play they are rehearsing—*Il giuoco delle parti* (*Six Characters* 212). Even Hinkfuss admits that the scenario he is using to create the improvised performance is based on a piece by Pirandello (*Tonight We Improvise* 469). In effect, Pirandello is not fooling his audience but is instead inviting them to reflect on their role as participants in the event itself and in the endurance of his reputation as

\textsuperscript{77} Though, there was a riot following the premiere of *Six Characters*, so in at least one instance, the audience defied expectation.
both impish and inscrutable. In the confusion of the “involuntary prologue” and in the lobby
interludes between the acts, *Tonight We Improvise* stakes itself on the necessary doubling that
makes any theatrical event possible—actors stand in for the characters and sets, props, and
costumes become places, objects, and clothing. But *Tonight We Improvise* marks the audience’s
presence as necessary because in fulfilling the expectation of receiving (favorably, poorly, or
indifferently) the efforts of the creative body that mounts a performance, the audience lends
value and legitimacy to the dramatic endeavor; it is the final piece to the puzzle. *Tonight We
Improvise* highlights this by casting its audience in the role of Audience, just as the Leading
Lady is dealt the role of Mommina.

But, as suggested, this doubling—the necessary representation on which the theatre is
built—has its limitations. Time really has no adequate representation, at least not in the same
way that a character can be represented by an actor or a specific object by a prop. A second is a
second, and unless one wants to get into the finer points of how atomic and optical clocks work
to keep out increasingly connected world in sync and show the implications of the failure of such
devices, one would be hard pressed to prove that time flows differently in the process of a
theatrical production than it does in real life. Events in narratives and drama can be compressed,
dilated, presented simultaneously, in flashback, in projections into the future (or in any number
of imaginative configurations), but if a play is advertised as being 2.5 hours long, mathematically
and mechanically, a time frame reasonably close to that figure has transpired over the course of
the event. In this way, we are reminded that we can never dispense fully with the measurability
of time, both as an important aspect of the performance event and more generally as a feature of
everyday life.

Still, recognizing these difficulties does not get us any closer to the dramaturgy of time in
*Tonight We Improvise*, leaving us perhaps further from the topic than the consideration of
Bergson’s contributions to the topic in the previous section. While time will be addressed—one would hope that a thesis about Pirandello’s dramaturgy of time would not neglect its stated goal in the final chapters—there is a great deal of groundwork to be laid. Time will return to the fore, but at the moment must be set aside while continuing to deal with the complications surrounding that act of representation.

The playfulness of Pirandello’s text obscures the complexity of the project. *Tonight We Improvise* demonstrates what *Six Characters* failed to show—what it might look like if a character were to truly inhabit the body of the actor portraying them, if only for a moment. It even further suggests the danger of such an endeavor, and how the theatrical apparatus and the structuring force of the theatre’s conventions make the endeavor possible, and safe (presumably).

The moment in which the Leading Lady has a fit (while her character Mommina dies at the climax of the inner play) not only points to the frailty of the human body, bringing us back to a Bergsonian treatment of corporeality but also allows Pirandello to blur the line between fiction and reality. This scene was written a moment in which the world of the characters in which the story plays out occupies the same space and time as the stage and the theatrical event the audience is supposedly witnessing, confusing the relationship between what is real and fictional, and calling into question what is actually being represented and how (or even if) that representation is able to function. Worlds are not necessarily colliding in *Tonight We Improvise*—certainly not in the way they do in *Six Characters*—but are in effect passing through one another, overlaying one on the other without displacing either.78

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78 This will return in a somewhat more technical way later in the chapter when we move beyond relativity and into the realm of quantum theory.
In terms of Husserl’s phenomenological project, there is something similar under consideration. Two possible worlds come into focus in both Pirandello’s plays and in Husserl’s work—the *experience world* which stands as “a limitless system of current experiences which can be made explicit within the horizon created by experience; the sphere of freed and self-willed changeability is limited within it” and the *fantasy world* consisting of “completely free worlds, each fantasy thing abiding in the fantasy world as a quasi-world; the horizon of the fantasy world's indefiniteness cannot be made explicit by some analysis of experience” (Uzelac 14). For Husserl, the fictional world is made of *quasi*-real things, which themselves exist in their own fictional time and space; the work of art, and in particular, the work of drama and theatre, become a way of modifying fantasy so that it can be perceived, if only in part (14).

But drama departs from the work of sculpture or painting, since in the visual arts works often offer up reflections of objects in the real world (15). Drama and theatre are very different in both their goal and execution. As Milan Uzelac succinctly puts it,

> During the performance of a theatre play we live in the world of perceptive fantasy, finding ourselves on the ground of *quasi*-reality; we see a sequence of images and link them into a single image, but here it is obviously not a matter of a reflection such as we have in the case of works of visual art. What happens on stage is a reflecting representation (of a historical character, e.g. Richard III or Wallenstein); this representation obviously has an aesthetic function; it is evident that we are not dealing with a reflection but with an image produced in the imagination; it is a matter of perceptive fantasy, of immediate imagination (Husserl, cited in Uzelac 15).

Coupled with this is the necessary doubling of the real and represented worlds introduced above, taking the observer out of the experience world and allowing them a glimpse into the world of fiction (Uzelac 16;17). Unlike the experience world, “normal perception” is not at the heart of the theatrical event, that is, “one does not start from the reality of the perceptively manifesting; from the outset we know that what we see is not something real, all that is seen has a nullifying
character. The real becomes existentially neutral and makes it possible for the unreal to reach the foreground, to be seen as real” (17).

The complicated issues that Tonight We Improvise laid out before us, we can now tentatively turn our attention to the subject of time. For the fictional world of a play—any play—to be rendered and made real in the aforementioned “experience world” requires, in part, a process of synthesis by which the whole product might be understood (and subsequently contained). Turning back to Husserl’s account of time consciousness and the example of how a melody is experienced and retained in memory, it is clear that a play, being read or watched, may function in the same way, as experiences and moments compound upon and interpenetrate one another in the mind of the audience.

This synthesis is on display and under examination in Tonight We Improvise, along with the concerns about the limits of representation. Even the most cursory reading of the play text shows that the play is about the building of a theatrical event out of (almost) nothing. While the other two plays in this study have also been about the creative process (in Six Characters, the challenges of realizing a creative vision in space and time; in Henry IV the process by which one build an identity over the course of a life), they mainly centered on the nature of the possible product of that process. Tonight We Improvise departs radically from that position, acutely concerned with the process such that the process itself is reimagined as a product.

It is not easy to reconcile these two things—how can the temporal extension that defines the creative process, and the relative fixity of the art product be collapsed one and the same? The creative process, after all, precedes the work of art, and while integral to the piece, is not the art itself. The question of time and representation might appear on the surface to be a complicated one, but a large part of Husserl’s phenomenological project (and a large part of philosophical inquiry that preceded him) was dedicated to how the different dimensions of time
(the past and future) are represented in the present (Gallagher 135). Husserl rejects the notion of a “specious present” in which the present is not a “knife-edge” phenomenon, but is itself made up of a brief temporal extension, containing a bit of the past and a bit of the future (136). Instead, Husserl looks to the temporal extension of consciousness itself, from which a specious present might be derived, but is not itself the substance of consciousness (138). The structures of time consciousness, already discussed at length in preceding chapters, are inextricably bound up in intentionality and the “experience world” in which art is received and interpreted. In calling attention to the spectators in *Tonight We Improvise*, Pirandello shifts the focus from what the audience sees to how it is seeing. Actors, sets, costumes, etc., represent a personality or setting, and the consolidation of these elements in the theatrical event produce an image (but not a reflection), transferring the audience into an “artistic illusion” that reveals the world of fantasy by way of real action and materials (Uzelac 15-16). While protention (in terms of time-consciousness) offers no concrete guarantee of what will happen in the future—it only refers to the sense that something will happen—the reception of a performance is not without structure or expectation, as Husserl points out that we, the audience, see what we have been taught or have prepared ourselves to see (15).

*Tonight We Improvise*, even with its chronological and theoretical distance from *Six Characters*, continues the work of its predecessor, exploring the overarching theme of what it takes to render a creative impulse into a work of art, using the medium of drama itself to interrogate what it takes to make drama. Like *Six Characters*, whether or not the play is successfully produced can be endlessly debated (the Characters do play the drama of their search for an author, however unknowingly, in their attempts to stage a domestic drama; the inner drama of *Tonight We Improvise* faces near-constant interruptions, but no matter, since it is not really the substance of the play itself). The constant interruption of the latter play may in fact
speak more to time consciousness and intentionality than is readily apparent. If protention is the “intentional sense that something more will happen” even if the specific something is indeterminate (Gallagher 140), Pirandello’s constant interruptions and undercutting of the events of the production call attention to the act of spectatorship by creating conditions wherein the audience is constantly reminded that this is a play, and dependent upon a synthetic process that necessarily transpire across time. In doing so, Pirandello does not halt the ongoing synthetic process by which experiences and perceptions build upon and interpenetrate one another, but instead serves to remind that this play, too, the drama of creating drama that is Tonight We Improvise, represents the world of experience that only resides in fantasy. The audience, even from the beginning, is perhaps prepared for an unconventional evening of theatre, but the extent to which the play undermines the passivity of the audience in the two previous theatre plays cannot be understated. The protentional aspect of time-consciousness is highlighted, with the constant interruptions of the inner drama calling attention not to the work of company on stage, but to the incomplete quality of the improvised play. The structure and content of Tonight We Improvise serves to subvert the “anticipation of what the imminent course of experience will provide” (139), redirecting the focus of the audience not only to the mishaps on stage, but to their expectations and experiences as spectators of what is anticipated from an evening at the theatre, and what can be reasonably expected from their participation in the theatrical even as an audience. It’s not an exercise in Pirandellian humor per se, but does necessitate an element of reflection that is a requisite part of Pirandello’s brand of humor. Just as the experience of humor demands that the observer of Pirandello’s pitiful old woman recognizes their emotional or intellectual involvement in what he is seeing, so too does Tonight We Improvise demand that its audience sees how its participation (by way of their very perceptions) is integral to the construction of the event itself. The play precludes the audience’s investment in the on stage
happenings, because the audience is itself put on stage in a way, forced to evaluate its own role in the creation of the performance.

3 Art and the Meaning of Being in *Tonight We Improvise*

The co-creation of the work of art in performance by the audience and the theatre company, as well as the problems and potentials of representation, necessarily bring us back to Heidegger. In adopting the modern philosophical viewpoint that representations bridge the distance between subject and object, Heidegger does not contest the claim that representations are able to “mediate our experience of the world,” but instead denies that representations manage to explain existence in all its complexity (Thomson "Heidegger's Aesthetics" n. page). Heidegger pursues a work of art’s historical essence and dispenses with a more conventional aesthetic approach that brings form and content to the fore. Heidegger’s treatment of the work of art was not one of looking for common characteristics or methods of creation, but rather evaluating the work of art itself as a thing—its “thingness” (Barky 353-354). As demonstrated in the preceding chapters, art, as an object under scrutiny, possesses an important relationship with its historical context, standing out against, but never separate from the conditions of its creation (Petruzzi 60-61; Heidegger "Origin of the Work of Art" 133).

*Tonight We Improvise*, like all the plays considered in this study, precedes Heidegger’s 1935 lecture, “The Origin of the Work of Art.” While this has not yet precluded a Heideggerian treatment of Pirandello’s dramas, *Tonight We Improvise* is also perhaps furthest afield in terms of the primary themes and questions it poses towards the creative act. As previously mentioned, this play seems to collapse process and product into one another, rendering them not as parts or phases of a continuum along which an artistic inspiration is ultimately realized in a work of art, but rather treating the process as product—that is, as a work of art—itself. So, in the case of
*Tonight We Improvise* we are faced with the problem of what exactly the work of art is standing out against and from what conditions it originates.

There are two complimentary ways to approach the problem. One is with an analysis of the play text, which has served well up to this point, since the preceding chapters have relied heavily on close reading. But, concurrently, one must more thoroughly consider a (largely idealized) performance of the play as well. The sections in which Bergson and Husserl have served in expounding upon this play have already begun to suggest what a performance might “mean” in relation to the play text, but as this chapter proceeds toward understanding the play by way of the phenomenological perspective advanced by Heidegger, the performance component presumed by a dramatic text will eventually move to center stage.

It is a testament to Pirandello’s vision that even he anticipates the complications of navigating the journey from play text to performance event. As a text, *Tonight We Improvise* emerges at a particularly interesting part of Pirandello’s career as a dramatist. His Teatro d’Arte folded in 1928, and Pirandello subsequently spent a large part of the years 1928-1930 in Berlin (Bassnett and Lorch 147; 157). *Tonight We Improvise* owes a great deal to this German context, even having premiered in Königsberg in January of 1930 (157; 190). Pirandello appreciated the German theatre, as reported by Corrado Alvaro in 1929:

> I admire German theatre for its discipline and for the perfect means which is has at its disposal. The director here can achieve any amount of technical miracles. German actors are the most discipline and meticulous in the world. They don’t act, they live with the appearances of a minutely observed reality. They lack, perhaps, the actor in the Italian sense of the word, the inspired improviser among a crowd of mediocre walk-ons. Here, they are all perfect, from the first to the last. You can often go to a theatre and see a great actor who only has a very small part. But how important this all is for the balance and efficacy of the production […] But the possibility of obtaining any effect, technique carried to its maximum perfection will end up by killing theatre. Sometimes these *regisseurs* just take an outline of a play which allows them to bring on stage all manner of things never before seen there and make a show out of them. Dance, acrobatics, circus horses, quick scene changed effected by powerful and perfect stage machines, are...
becoming so many means of corrupting theatre itself. I intend to react to this tendency with my new play” [Tonight We Improvise] (1929 interview with Corrado Alvaro, in Bassnett and Lorch 157-158).

So we have a play that stands out against its German context, lampooning the extraordinary efforts of the directors and mocking the actors in whom Pirandello did not see the proclivity towards improvisation (and respect for status) at work in the Italian theatre. Tonight We Improvise may well be a parody of German theatre practices, even to the point that, despite Sateramo’s assertion that Edward Gordon Craig was the inspiration for Hinkfuss, there is the possibility that Pirandello’s buffoonish director is a stab at Max Reinhardt. In fact, Pirandello, dedicated the German edition of Tonight We Improvise to Reinhardt, triggering a poor reception of the play in Berlin (Bassnett and Lorch 158). Reinhardt stands among those individuals whose vision and methods transformed the idea of director from a largely administrative function to its modern artistic role, and his tremendous attention to detail and staging are reflected in Hinkfuss (or rather, exploited ad absurdum). There is an echo of Reinhardt techniques in the fifth interlude following Act II, in which Dr. Hinkfuss performs a “scenic miracle,” partaking of the pleasure […] of preparing for the public left in the theatre the beautiful scenic effects of an airfield at night, under a magnificent starry sky. Everything on the ground is small, to give the impression of infinite space bounded only by star-strewn sky; in back, the white buildings that house the OFFICERS, with their small lit windows, here and there scattered about the field two or three airplanes, all very small. One hears the roar of an airplane out of sight, flying in the tranquil night” (Pirandello Tonight We Improvise 492).

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79 La simultaneità dovrà essere anche però regolata secondo il tempo che bisognerà al DOTTOR HINKFUSS per compiere i suoi prodigi sul palcoscenico. Tali prodigi potrebbero essere lasciati alla bizzarria del DOTTOR HINKFUSS. Ma poiché lui stesso, e non l’autore della novella, ha voluto che RICO VERRI e gli altri GIOVANI UFFICIALI fossero aviatori, è probabile che abbia voluto così per prendersi il piacere di preparare, davanti al pubblico rimasto nella sala, una bella scena che rappresenti un campo d’aviazione, messo con mirabile effetto in prospettiva. Di notte, sotto un magnifico cielo stellato, pochi elementi sintetici: tutto piccolo in terra, per dare la sensazione dello spazio sterminato con quel cielo seminato di stelle: piccola, in fondo, la casina bianca degli ufficiali, con le finestre illuminate, piccoli gli apparecchi, due o tre, sparsi sul campo qua e là: e una grande suggestione di luci cupe: e il ronzio di un aeroplano invisibile, che voli nella notte serena (Questa Sera 2436).
Having made everything of this scene just right, Hinkfuss declares that it is not right at all and has the stage hands clear the scene away immediately (Tonight We Improvise 493), giving his fictional director a moment of clarity, enough to resist the technical flare that Pirandello, in the Alvaro interview, sees as a corrupting influence.

It is the tension between executing technical precision and inviting improvisation and fantasy that marks Tonight We Improvise as a significant development in Pirandellian dramaturgy. On the one hand, Hinkfuss attempts to choreograph and control the “improvised” performance from the outset; on the other, he asserts in his bombastic address to the audience at the beginning of the play that the work of art only survives “because we still lift it out of the rigidity of its own form and let it loose inside ourselves, with our own life endow it with life…”80 (Tonight We Improvise 471). It is a sentiment that would be repeated on occasion in the latter part of Pirandello’s career, as demonstrated by his preface to D’Amico’s Storia del teatro italiano.

So, even before Heidegger’s comments on the origin and function of art were in wide circulation, Pirandello recognized the potential of a work of art to make meaning in a context that is not necessarily the same as the one from which it originated. Such revisions are not an act of erasure that position a work of art as new every time but instead, add to the history of the work and its reception. In the case of a play or performance, one might go back to the text to review and cut passages, or to the performance history to gauge its impact upon previous

80 Se un’opera d’arte sopravvive è solo perché noi possiamo ancora rimuoverla dalla fissità della sua forma; sciogliere questa sua forma dentro di noi in movimento vitale; e la vita glie la diamo allora noi; di tempo in tempo diversa, e varia dall’uno all’altro di noi; tante vite, e non una; come si può desumere dalle continue discussioni che se ne fanno e che nascono dal non voler credere appunto questo: che siamo noi a dar questa vita; sicché quella che do io non è affatto possibile che sia uguale a quella di un altro (Pirandello Questa Sera 2419).
audiences. These aspects are, of course, not the work itself, but they are not wholly independent of the work either.

But, what does that mean for a play, and for this play in particular? Are we proceeding on the assumption that the text which Pirandello produced and its subsequent performances are each themselves independent works of art? These last few pages have turned considerable attention to the historical context of the dramatic text *Tonight We Improvise*, yet Pirandello, now a man of the theatre in the late 1920s, understood and deeply appreciated the distinction between a play text and its realization on-stage. Hinkfuss declares that in freeing the dramatic text from formal constraints, the company can with their own life endow the work with life (Pirandello *Tonight We Improvise* 471). But what constitutes that life? If, and how, is it transformed into a performance event?

As detailed in the preceding chapters, Heidegger’s particular characterization is encapsulated in the term *Dasein*, or “being-there.” Of *Dasein’s* many important aspects, its givenness towards self-interpretation and openness to re-interpretation might serve us well here (Wrathall and Murphy 5). *Dasein* is a sort of becoming that is never complete—except in its death (Heidegger *Being and Time* 280). Additionally, *Dasein* is an entity that engages in a kind of “being-with” other *Daseins*. As Wrathall and Murphy put it, *Dasein* “understands its identity, as well as the identities of other *Daseins*, in terms of the norms that govern the use of publicly available equipment and the social interactions that are built up around cooperative projects” (13). But, when it comes to being, what role does a work of art have to play? In fact, the work of art has a very important role in understanding the being of the self, the world, and the relationship between the two; For Heidegger, the emergence of a new work of art within a culture signals a shift in “the understanding of what it is to be …” (Dreyfus 353). Even the
concept of “understanding” itself comes under scrutiny in Heidegger’s *Being and Time*, as Wrathall and Murphy note:

> In *understanding*, we project onto possibilities, meaning we grasp the actual in terms of the possible – that is, in terms of a space of significations that governs how the actual relates to other things, how it develops, what opportunities it affords, and so on. As one pursues those possibilities, one interprets oneself and the possibilities, developing them and working them out (Wrathall and Murphy 15).

With all of these concepts and questions under scrutiny, it is easy to lose sight of the fact that Heidegger’s overarching project was the interrogation of being itself, and one thing that is abundantly clear in his treatment of being is the aspect of *Dasein’s* being-towards-death. The plays covered in the preceding chapters and the overwhelming scholarship around Heidegger’s work treat death in particular with the conventional understanding of the phenomenon as it relates to mortality and demise, there is a less common, yet remarkably significant treatment of the concept as the “*collapse of an understanding of being* exemplified by scientific paradigm shift […] or *the end of an historical world*, which allows a new historical epoch to take shape” (Thomson "Death and Demise in *Being and Time*" 262) This second consideration of death—as a metaphor suggestive of a shift in understanding of being and *Dasein’s* relationship to the world—anticipates Heidegger’s idea that the work of art itself signals this shift. With this in mind, we must determine what shift *Tonight We Improvise* is signaling—what it is standing out against—specifically with regards to time.

For Heidegger, the question of Being underpins all intellectual and scientific inquiries (as highlighted by Heidegger in the opening remarks of *Being and Time* *Being and Time* 21-25).

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81 Perhaps a more flexible reading of the plays could account for a variety of death: the titular Six Characters confront the undoing of their own selves at the ontological and epistemological impasse with the theatre company, while the protagonist of *Henry IV* presents us with both physiological and ontological frailty.
By including the scientific shift in this account of the evolution of Pirandello’s theatre (in addition to, not instead of, the attention paid to the German context of *Tonight We Improvise*), this thesis attempts to demonstrate not only the profundity of Pirandello’s treatment of the human condition and the ontological peculiarities of the dramatic arts, but also the magnitude of his appreciation of inextricable connections between the two. Drama and theatre are, like so many things, are uniquely human endeavors. Relativity and quantum theory transform the scientific understanding of the world, with tremendous aesthetic consequences; the preceding chapters have already discussed at length the role of relativism in Pirandello’s major dramas. The following section will turn its attention to the quantum world, and how it might account for the multiplicity of worlds and realities that converge upon the stage in *Tonight We Improvise*. New developments in the world of science—and our understanding of them—represent our projections of what is possible. Pirandello’s *Tonight We Improvise* is, in many ways an inquiry into the possibility. The “demon of experiment” (Pirandello *Six Characters* 222)\(^{82}\) that the Six Characters debated at the beginning of the decade once again makes its appearance in *Tonight We Improvise*, along with a deeper, more nuanced consideration of what it means to rouse it.

4 Beyond Relativism: Pirandello’s Quantum Poetics

Pirandello’s own fascination with undoing (proceeding, in this chapter, from Heidegger’s handling of *Dasein’s* undoing in death) demands consideration. Pirandello’s view of the potentialities and peculiarities of the dramatic arts underwent significant revisions over the latter half of his life, from his first significant observations on the form’s weaknesses in 1899 through his celebration of the capacity for renewal that he saw at work in the theatre as late as 1934 in his

\(^{82}\) *IL FIGLIO* (accostandosi al DIRETTORE, freddo, piano, ironico) Sí, stiano a sentire che squarcio, adesso! Parlerà loro del Dèmone dell’Esperimento (Pirandello *Sei personaggi* 109).
introduction to d’Amico survey of Italian theatre history. Pirandello, born in 1867 living half his life in the 19th-century and half in the 20th, bore witness to the social upheaval following Italian unification, the private turmoil resulting from the ruin of his family’s business, the (largely unquestioned) mental illness of his wife, the rise of Mussolini, and any number of political and personal tumults that may have left their indelible marks on his work. Whether by accident or by design, Pirandello and his theatre are fundamentally concerned with undoing. But, he did not wish to destroy the theatre (certainly not at the point in his career at which he wrote Tonight We Improvise) but only to reveal the potency of drama and performance as having realities all their own.

But, Pirandello was not the only one engaged in this business of undoing. In addition to the societal and personal upheavals that lend context to Pirandello’s output, science too was rewriting and/or extending conventional understandings of reality. The rise of relativity had given Pirandello much to work with, but in the late 1920s, quantum theory and the concept of uncertainty revealed the curious nature of atomic world—certain models of which display a remarkable duality in which light behaves as both a particle and a wave, and in which one unfortunate, though mercifully theoretical cat might find itself trapped in a box, somehow both alive and dead at the same time.

Pirandello wrote Tonight We Improvise in the midst of this quantum undoing, as the multiplicity of reality and experience were only just being revealed. And the aesthetic consequences can be read of this too, can be read and witnessed in this drama, even in the title, which alludes to an improvised performance that is, previously covered, decidedly, perhaps even meticulously, rehearsed. But the title isn’t a lie, or a deception (as J.L. Styan might have you believe)—it’s merely an aspect of a work of art that is aware of itself as a part of a newly emerged quantum world. The study of literature offers a way into this quantum reading of
Pirandello’s drama. In particular, the concept of Quantum Poetics proves to be especially useful. According to Steven Carter, quantum poetics “shatters language, reducing it to its fundamental constituents; both quantum physics and quantum mechanics seek to discover what the medium of investigation—the physicist’s instruments, the poet’s words—is composed of” (178). Carter goes on to identify the crucial limit that both the physicist and the poet face—the medium in which they work (178). Neither can escape the system perfectly; they can only work within and account for the peculiarities of the system which they are evaluating (178). This is precisely what Pirandello is interrogating in the course of composing his theatre plays—especially Tonight We Improvise. Over the whole trilogy, Pirandello examines the complexities of writing for, and then more broadly, working in, the theatre. It’s a process (or perhaps more accurately, a study) from which Pirandello, as our playwright and chief investigator, cannot absent himself. The opening comments of this chapter demonstrate how Pirandello highlights the necessity of the theatrical apparatus in Tonight We Improvise and is a consideration to which we must now return. In quantum theory and in quantum poetics, the apparatus by which a study is carried out is just as much as part of the system under scrutiny; Schrödinger’s famous thought experiment does not only consist of a cat and vial of radioactive material, but also the box which contains them and the act of opening it to observe the cat. Likewise, the theatre space and the performance itself are part of Pirandello’s understanding of what theatre is and how it works. The theatre is by virtue of the space in which it is contained and what is chosen to transpire within it.

This thesis has gone to considerable length to map out the trajectory of Pirandello’s career as a playwright, from his youthful skepticism through to his mature understanding of the form. Tonight We Improvise signals not the endpoint of that development, but an immense shift in Pirandello’s understanding of the distance between theatre in theory and in practice. The play
represents, in part, an embrace of the emerging quantum world, albeit a tentative one. But if it is such an embrace, what is the mechanism by which the play explores the nature of reality (as well as the peculiarities of theatrical creation)? It isn’t Hinkfuss’s folly of making unwilling actors improvise a play according to a Pirandellian scenario. Instead, Pirandello, as already demonstrated, attempts to both reveal the nature of theatrical creation to the audience, and implicate the audience in the reality of the performance—one only might look at the lobby interludes Pirandello wrote in addition to the text of the drama that plays out onstage, and Hinkfuss’ so-called “involuntary prologue.” In short, both the creative process and the work it produces coalesce into a work engaged in a new understanding of a world that is a consequence of quantum theory.

The resulting drama demands that the reader, and later the audience, contend with the duality by which the theatre is constituted. The inner play, when it proceeds without incident, is of little interest. Instead, it is points of rupture between the inner play and the work of the actors as actors that acknowledges the shared space which the physical properties of the play (sets, costumes, etc.) occupy at the same time a story is created and allowed to transpire, in the theatrical space and across time (that is, the time of the performance, but also within the temporal distortion that may come with any narrative form). The ontological and epistemological impasses that plague the events of Six Characters in Search of an Author are mitigated, if not totally dispelled, in Tonight We Improvise, demonstrating the creative force that drives the work being produced is inextricably linked to the apparatus by which that work is witnessed. Already, this chapter has offered up the slap exchanged between two the two Character Actors as a suggestion the play’s focus on corporeality and the multiplicities at work in the theatrical event (character/actor, sets/locations; costume/clothing, etc.). It is a moment that highlights the “doing” of theatre and its position as the thing that “does.” Quantum theory includes the
apparatus of experimentation as part of the system under observation. Likewise, Pirandello’s embrace of the quantum considers the theatre not just as a product, and certainly not a product resulting from the efforts of a writer, a director or some actors, but as a system with its own realities, mechanics, and ways of existing—without any of these considerations or elements, theatre isn’t, and without theatre, we cannot evaluate efficacy of any of these components.

Pirandello further complicates the duality of the theatre as both process and product during the moment of Mommina’s death and the Lead Actress’ on-stage fit. At once the audience witnesses the literal collapse of the actress and character into one entity, a collapse that has serious ramifications, since Pirandello’s leading lady has no way to protect herself from the physical ailments that affect her character. This is precisely why, by the end of the play, Hinkfuss’ company is so adamant on restoring a more controlled, linear progression to the production process, which would include a playwright, written parts, and rehearsals; as previously noted, Hinkfuss, admits that written parts would be helpful (Pirandello Today We Improvise 525-526).

The call for written parts, even by Hinkfuss, might seem deceptive, undermining the quantum nature that the play explores by restoring the dramatic text to its place as the source of the theatrical event. But, this is not the case. In Tonight We Improvise, Pirandello does not do away with the duality of process and product—it would be impossible, since a performance is itself a process that transpires in space and across time. You’ll notice that Pirandello’s Hinkfuss only concedes on the utility of written parts, if necessary, but not on the necessity of the author. Even at this point, after Pirandello had made a great number of theoretical and practical leaps in the theatre, there is still hint of suspicion of the playwright that Pirandello freely expressed in 1899, and which continued to appear even in the 1920’s with Six Characters in Search of an Author, since in that play, the titular Characters do not understand the necessity of reducing their
story (really six stories) to the physical and temporal confines of the theatrical event. With an author, a story must be streamlined and made intelligible. With living Characters, one might have the complexity and confusion that real life can offer. Multiple stories, with the same events and characters can exist, the importance of which is directly tied to the point of view a person has on the story and they choices which are made in and around it.

So, what is “real life?” What is reality comprised of in Pirandello’s worldview? To say it’s multifaceted is an understatement—Pirandello’s characters constantly face a multiplicity of possible worlds, from the question of identity in It is so (if you think so) to the failure of mutual understanding in Six Characters (to say nothing of the variety of potential narratives the Characters represent). Henry IV offers us a world in which personal and official history can come under scrutiny, and how identity can be questioned when one’s understanding and experience of history is compromised. In short (and unsurprisingly), any sort of objective reality remains elusive for Pirandello. All that to say, the text might serve as the impetus for the work in the theatre, rather than something that constrains the efforts of the actors or director, and is itself reduced. Expansiveness, not distillation, becomes the name of the game at this of Pirandello’s career. For Pirandello, the medium of investigation is theatre itself (whether or not his plays deal explicitly with the making of performance), and his purpose is to lay bare the multiplicity of possibilities that not only characters bring to their stories, but that real people bring to their lives – after all, in his 1899 call for “spoken action,” Pirandello noted that it’s people, “living, free, and active,” which make the play, and so one must begin with people, not principles ("Spoken Action" 221). At its heart, Pirandello’s art comes from his pursuit of something that is uncontrived, art that is, miraculously, life, and vice-versa, art that is in essence the “world of things” (Six Characters 224) that each person carries inside of him or herself, however muddled by the words we use to express ourselves, as the Father in Six Characters
laments. Each world, coexisting, in the space and time of the stage, as dynamic and real as the next.

4.1 Revisiting and Resisting Metatheatre

Throughout this study, I have defended a necessary distance between Pirandello and the concept of metatheatre, but in returning to a play that once again tackles the distinctive problems and potentialities of creating for the theatre, I would be remiss in not considering how the concept bears out in relation to this drama, however briefly. As previously discussed, the play-within-a-play device is not the defining feature of metatheatre; according to the originator of the term, it does not necessarily even need to be employed in a work denoted as metatheatre (Abel 60). Among the dramas that Abel identifies as metatheatre, it would seem that that the key attribute is that they present life as “already theatricalized” (60).

However, Pirandello defies convention, and while his theatre plays have often fallen under the label of the “metatheatrical trilogy,” this thesis has attempted to demonstrate why distancing the playwright from the concept of metatheatre is valuable to evaluating his work. If anything, the second play of this study, Henry IV, with its focus on the conscious construction of identity and emphasis on the social networks within that construction, is perhaps the closest example this thesis offers to metatheatre, whereas Six Characters turns its attention to the origin of art and character, and scrutinizes the efficacy of the theatre itself.

Tonight We Improvise returns to the concerns of Six Characters, although with a far more optimistic approach than its predecessor. The director of the company, Dr. Hinkfuss, at the outset of the imminent performance, declares that “the work of art has many lives, not one,” (Pirandello Tonight We Improvise 471), and anticipating the comments on the collaborative nature of theatre-making and that process’ relationships to contemporary attitudes and practices
that Pirandello would espouse in his 1934 introduction to Silvio D’Amico’s *Storia del teatro italiano*, continues with the assertion that “… it is impossible for the life I [Hinkfuss] give to a work of art to be like the life someone else is giving it” (*Tonight We Improvise* 471).

In short, Hinkfuss’ long speech to the audience about the nature of the evening’s performances deals with, in part, with one of the central ideas of *Six Characters*: authority. *Six Characters*, as Marie Lovrod asserts in her rather unquestioning acceptance and analysis of the play as metadrama, considers at length the “problematic issue of who holds the authoritative perspective on reality, and indeed, the question of whether or not there is one” (502). While the possession of this authoritative perspective on what constitutes reality and truth certainly represents a key concern of metatheatre, my primary purpose questioning of *Six Characters*’ status as metatheatre is only to distance the play, and much of Pirandello’s dramatic output from the baggage the terms carries, and the shorthand that it has come to signify—namely, that metatheatre is theatre about theatre. There is no doubt that Pirandello wrote, and witnessed the interpretation of, dramas that were, in fact, about drama, theatre, and the processes by which these things are produced and presented. But as we have seen, this does not make or break metatheatre, and when the analysis of Pirandello’s drama fails to depart, even briefly, from an assumption of the metatheatrical, the scholar, artists, or audience is deprived of other, equally nuanced understandings of what Pirandello’s theatre did, and can continue to, accomplish.

Still, the question of whether or not *Tonight We Improvise* fulfills the criteria for metatheatre is worth a bit of attention. And, as with *Six Characters*, it is not an easy question to answer. In the preceding chapters, the connection between tragedy and metatheatre has been the primary motivation for distancing Pirandello from the classification, which makes sense,

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83 See Footnote 80
especially when one considers the seemingly tragic circumstances that compel the Six Characters
to seek fulfillment in a work of art. Yet, metatheatre also accounts for a theatre that is conscious
of its own theatricality (Carlson 450). Metatheatre belongs to a world that is a “projection of
human consciousness” and in which order is improvised rather than imposed (450). As Marvin
Carlson puts it, “[t]he goal of metatheatre is not transcendence; it is wonder at the capacity of
this human imaginations” (450).

Given the privileged place that improvisation and imagination hold in a world that makes
metatheatre possible, it is tempting to include Tonight We Improvise in the category of
metadrama; after all, “improvise” is right there in the title! But, Pirandello continues to resist the
label. In spite of the title, nothing is left to chance in this play. Tonight We Improvise is a fully
scripted drama, from the onstage noises and audience outbursts during the “involuntary
prologue,” to moment the director, Dr Hinkfuss, is driven out by his own company, to the
leading actress’s fainting spell during the emotional death scene of her character. As noted, there
are even recommendations for the lobby interludes at the act breaks.

Even with the relative openness of a dramatic text in relation to its completion in
performance, Pirandello has done what the Father of Six Characters demanded of the Director in
1921: he has imposed a little order, and in that imposition of order, Pirandello attempts to
discover what is possible in the theatre and through a single artistic vision. His Hinkfuss is loud
and strange looking, and a little ridiculous, an apparent mockery of the kind of artist (again,
perhaps referencing Craig or Reinhardt) who find the expression of their individual poetic vision
to be both the source and purpose of art, and whose meticulous stagecraft helped shape the idea
of what the modern director is and does. Yet, it is only after Hinkfuss seems to take his leave of
the company that the actors are able to begin to approach the fictional director’s goal and start to
embody the spoken action that, for Pirandello, motivates the dramatic art.
It is here that the question of metatheatre and Pirandello becomes truly interesting. Through all of Hinkfuss’s apparent attempts to make a theatre that breaks from the formal limitations of the theatre (Pirandello *Tonight We Improvise* 471), Pirandello continually reveals the world of a work of art that cannot be represented effectively without the necessary containing mechanisms of theatrical convention and structure. When Hinkfuss makes a concerted effort to situate the work of art on stage and as a product of all of the clever techniques and tricks (for example, the miniature airfield in the fifth interlude before Act III), he is immediately dissatisfied and demands it cleared away (*Tonight We Improvise* 493). The moment the spoken action that is the source of dramatic art is let loose within the Leading Actress, she suffers. Yet, even her profoundly moving moment is undercut, as Hinkfuss barges on to the stage and it is revealed that, instead of leaving, he had overseen the lighting effects that heightened the emotional content of the scene (*Tonight We Improvise* 525), again confusing the distinction between that which originates from the realm of art and that mechanical or aesthetic apparatuses that make that original impulse understandable.

At every step, *Tonight We Improvise* tries to center itself upon its own theatricality, that is, it tries to give itself over the gaze that “[situates] the object or the other in a ‘framed theatrical space’” or transforms “a simple event into signs in such a way that it becomes a spectacle” (Féral 98) only to have that act of surrender undermined by the bumbling Hinkfuss. In essence, space becomes the vehicle of theatricality, not the actor (in spite of the central place that bodies and embodiment hold in *Tonight We Improvise*), (96) and it is the act of spectatorship and the intermingling of aesthetic convention and discursive practices that serve as the source of theatricality, rather than an assumption of some inherent property. The necessary distance for the spectator’s gaze is negated by Pirandello’s implication of the audience, and so, *Tonight We
Improvisation does not fully satisfy this test of metatheatricality as they are invited to observe as act their own role in the theatre space.

Furthermore, Pirandello mocks the playwrights and theatre-makers which prompted his critique of and response to the naturalist stage and the modernist experiments that would follow it; he has thought of the fact and constructed a play about the failures and shortcomings of creating a play which demonstrates that fact. The moments in which Hinkfuss appears to cede control approach metatheatricality, but in Pirandello’s construction this willingness to surrender becomes unsustainable, as the fictional director is unable to stop himself from intervening in the action. If metatheatre improvises order and marvels at the capacity of human imagination, as Carlson suggests, Tonight We Improvise demonstrates the consequences of an imagining that is inhibited, that is too focused on the technical minutiae that make theatre possible. Hinkfuss’ raison d’être is to create an improvised work at the center of a truly unusual evening at the theatre, yet the scripted drama set out before the reader or audience, and the idiosyncrasies with which Pirandello imbues Hinkfuss instead sentence the director to playing the story of failing to enact his creative vision, like the Six Characters must instead dramatize their attempt and failure at dramatization. Hinkfuss’ tenuous grasp on authority undercuts the metatheatrical impulse that centers on a performance’s theatricality. In this final brush with metatheatre, a treatment of theatricality commensurate with the concept of metatheatre seems to remain out of reach. By revealing the mechanisms that make the stagecraft of Craig and Reinhardt possible, and in exploring the necessary boundaries that contain the work “inspired improviser” of the Italian stage and make that work intelligible, meaningful, and where necessary, safe, Pirandello redirects the gaze of the audience. In some ways, Pirandello’s humor, and more recent treatments of theatricality have much in common, as they are not really readily identifiable, tangible aspects of a work. Rather, theatricality, like humor, may function as a process, in which
the spectator’s gaze takes on a defining role. Josette Féral describes the necessity of the gaze in
the concept of theatricality, writing:

Theatricality has occurred under two conditions: first through a performer’s
reallocating of the quotidian space that he occupies; second through a spectator’s
gaze framing a quotidian space that he does not occupy. Such actions create a
cleft that divides space into the “outside” and the “inside” of theatricality. This
space is the space of the “other”; it is the space that defines both alterity and
theatricality (97).

If this is the case, that theatricality is implicitly the act of looking or being looked at (98), then

_Tonight We Improvise_, as well as a large part of Pirandello’s output, seems to turn this the
concept on its head. Pirandello explodes the “framed theatre space,” redirecting the gaze of the
audience back on to itself, confusing the inside and outside spaces of theatricality that Féral
proposes in her consideration of the concept. In doing so, Pirandello continues the implication of
the audience introduced in the preceding sections, such that the “othering gaze” that precipitates
an understanding of theatricality is made impossible, for, by gazing at the performance, the
spectators are also forced to gaze at themselves as an inextricable part of the event. They too are
contained by the theatre space and the conventions of spectatorship such that there is no space to
marvel at their autonomy, because Pirandello, in his abundant playfulness, has cast his spectators
in that very role, and creates a space in which they must perform it so that the play (but not the
drama) can find completion.

5  _Tonight We Improvise_: Towards Undoing and Death

At the risk of doubling back, _Tonight We Improvise_, though not Pirandello’s most
popular or produced play, perhaps best encapsulates what makes him such a dynamic force of
20th-century theatre. The three plays covered in this thesis interrogate the origin of art, challenge
that efficacy of the theatre, and highlight the limits of both self- and mutual understanding.

Pirandello’s mature dramas, and these three especially are not just a study in the playwright’s
dramaturgy of time, but are a record of change over time themselves, as philosophy and science propelled the world towards newer, deeper ways of understanding and towards the metaphorical death that such a new understanding precipitates. *Tonight We Improvise* is not a study in time in the same ways as *Six Characters* or *Henry IV*. And yet, it belongs with them as the culmination of Pirandello’s theatrical endeavors of the 1920s, as the playwright allowed himself (and his work) to be gradually transformed by practical experience as a theatre maker.

If anything, *Tonight We Improvise* stands as Pirandello’s proof of his own, self-conscious change, as old ways of being and engaging with the world were made null in the light of new philosophical and scientific innovations, as well as his own growth as an artist. As Iain Thomson notes in his account of the divergent interpretations of the death of *Dasein*,

Heidegger thinks […] one can experience one’s own end without yet having demised. […] Heidegger insists that we need not demise in order to die, in large part because of his aforementioned conviction that *Dasein* can experience its own end. Indeed, Heidegger thinks we can experience our intelligible world’s having ended (and that we do so in what he calls “death”), even though, by all appearances, we cannot live through our own demise in order to experience that end from beyond it. […] For Heidegger, “demise” designates this ultimately paradoxical “experience” of the end of one’s own life […] an event that we seem to be able to experience as it approaches but not when it has arrived, since once demise arrives our *Dasein* is no longer “here” to experience anything (Thomson "Death and Demise in *Being and Time*" 265).

Thomson elaborates on these distinctions between “perish,” “demise,” and “death,” noting,

in the desolate experience he calls “death,” the self—temporarily cut off from the world in terms of which it usually understands itself—finds itself radically alone with itself, and so can lucidly comprehend itself in its entirety for the first time, since there is no worldly, futural component of itself to elude its self-transparent grasp.

[…] Heidegger’s phenomenologically grounded conviction that there is a kind of end that is distinctive of *Dasein*—that we can experience our intelligible world as having ended and so exist in a way that is radically “finite” (*endlich*) – is what leads him to distinguish this “existential conception of death [*die existenziale Begriff des Sterbens*]” from demise ("Death and Demise in *Being and Time*", citing Heidegger, 266).
Unlike the two plays already covered, *Tonight We Improvise* bears no overwhelming fascination with time and the experience of its passage. Still, without *Six Characters*, *Henry IV*, or the Teatro d’Arte, and Pirandello’s considerable experience of German culture and theatre, *Tonight We Improvise* very well may never have been written. In many ways, Heidegger’s concept of death confronts the possibility of impossibility, that is, the “catastrophic collapse of this life project,” (“Death and Demise in *Being and Time*” 268-269) at which point *Dasein* is able to see itself as “projecting into projects, that is, as being who fundamentally takes a stand on its being, and is defined by that stand” (“Death and Demise in *Being and Time*” 271). While there is nothing so analogous to the complete collapse that Heidegger proposes in his characterization of death, perhaps *Tonight We Improvise* is Pirandello’s best reflection on the theatre, its possibilities, and the time it takes to realize its fullest potential.
Chapter 5
Conclusion

1 Theatre After Pirandello: A Case Study for *Krapp’s Last Tape*

The theatre of the second half of the 20th-century owes much to Pirandello’s influence, and with respect to time, one more brief study, exploring the connections between Pirandello and Beckett may demonstrate Pirandello’s considerable impact on the theatre and the degree to which his work probed the depths of identity, memory, time, and being. The preceding chapters have demonstrated how Pirandello’s treatment of time and temporality underpins his development as a playwright, his evolution stemming from his practical engagement with the conditions of theatrical creation. But, in spite of his provocative vision of the theatre, scholars and critics have often relegated Pirandello to the confines of theatrical modernity and his work as sharing with that period a tendency towards the,

decentring of the performance, the humorous separation of the two fundamental supports of the mimetic text, that is, of the dramatic story: dialogue and character [and the progressive disintegrations of] the social, interpersonal ego implied in the confrontations of monologue and dialogue (Krysinski 215).

As a way of demonstrating Pirandello’s influence beyond his own era, and as a resistance to the treatment of his work as historical curiosities, I offer a brief study of both Pirandello and Samuel Beckett, using the dramaturgy of time as a way of demonstrating Wladimir Krysisnki’s suggestion that Pirandello’s works, undeniable in their modernity, are nonetheless “open to postmodernism” (217). Focusing on the concept of time and using in particular Bergson’s theories of embodiment, perception and memory, this last case study will consider the dramaturgical continuity between Pirandello and Beckett. Textually, the continuum between Pirandello’s and Beckett’s dramaturgy can be difficult to discern; but, in terms of production
dramaturgy, a link is not at all difficult to establish. In fact, in his reflections on the parallels between Pirandello and Beckett, Rainer Zaiser notes that the similarities emerge more readily in the specific circumstances of production rather than in close reading (253). Both of these playwrights’ outputs emphasize the ebb and flow of the creative process—not simply the process through which the artist develops, but the process by which the individual assembles and dissembles the very foundations of their identity. For Pirandello, the process with which the “theatre-in-theatre” plays are concerned is one of dissolution (Paolucci 103). Anne Paolucci identifies two key features of Pirandello’s theatre which would set the stage, so to speak, for the so-called “theatre of the absurd.” She writes that he, “First [Pirandello] restored to the stage its central importance as the empty potency of dramatic experience” and secondly, he established a theatre in which its contents are concerned with dissolution of character (102-103). Subsequently, the dissolute character and reorganized stage emerge as one whole through which a “spiraling toward definition [serves as] the energizing content for his restructured stage [and] the core of dramatic experience” (103). Six Characters explicitly dramatizes the construction of identity through a process which transpires across moments of consciousness, self-consciousness, and finally what Paolucci refers to as “the willful assertion of reconstituted personality” (104).

If in conjunction with these thematic and formal details we consider how perception and memory interact at the horizon of the body, the work of Henri Bergson avails itself to our analysis. Bergson writes in Matter and Memory that the body is “an ever advancing boundary

84 There is certainly a wealth of information on the dramaturgical connections between Pirandello and Beckett; Christopher Innes and Frederick J. Marker, citing Andrew K. Kennedy, note that Pirandello’s interrogation of the “crisis of dramatic” language in Six Characters (and other works) “points forward” to Beckett’s theatre, particularly its anti-illusionistic and metatheatrical tendencies (Innes and Marker xiv).
between the future and the past, as a pointed end, which our past is continually driving forward into our future” (Matter and Memory 88). Yet, Luigi Pirandello’s *Six Characters in Search of an Author* and Samuel Beckett’s *Krapp’s Last Tape* both offer a problematizing gaze towards the relationship between the body, memory, and the passage of time. Pirandello’s play is particularly deceptive when it is encountered in production, and perhaps it is fair, if disappointing, to say that the theoretical underpinnings of the work are not necessarily best served by their practical application. The performance exists in time and space, as do the actors portraying their fictitious counterparts and the characters which invade the stage—itself doubled, as the facticity of the stage is heightened as it becomes both the place of the performance and the world intended by the playwright.

From this account alone, we begin to see how Pirandello emerges as a seminal playwright of the 20th-century and how his thematic and technical devices make possible what Martin Esslin dubbed “the theatre of the absurd.” Even though we cannot speak of Pirandello as explicitly belonging within Esslin’s canon of absurdist playwrights, his drama seems to have instituted, perhaps even perfected, some of the identifying features of the absurd theatre, notably, "the telescoping of time" (Paolucci 106).

It is with the telescoping of time that we turn our attention to Beckett, whose titular *Krapp* has a troubled relationship with time that is similar to that of the Six Characters. *Krapp*, like Pirandello’s sextet, is always in the present. Even as he listens to the tapes from his youth, there is little engagement with them as records of his own past. What the audience is invited to partake in is the decided otherness of the recorded *Krapp*. Like the characters who dismiss the efforts of the company, *Krapp* rejects the musings of the younger versions of himself. However, if one of the central problems posed with *Six Characters* is that of embodied experience and
performance, Beckett offers an even more subtle and nuanced consideration of the problem in Krapp. The repeated use and references to bananas are significant here. We see Krapp eat a banana and drop the peel. Almost immediately he slips and nearly stumbles on the dropped peel. He takes out another banana later. Meanwhile, his recordings bemoan the consumption of too many bananas (Beckett 450-451). Here is someone whose body and recorded memory warn him of bananas, and still he does not have enough awareness to be mindful of the threat they pose! In Krapp, we see the intersection of the comic and tragic that is the essence of Pirandello’s humor, the literary forebear of which is Don Quixote, who has “the bravery to meet every test, a very noble spirit, [and] the flame of faith,” in the face of illusions (Pirandello On Humor 89). As he tilts at windmills,

the knight obstinately persists in keeping lit, a defective, patched-up balloon that fails to rise, that has illusions of attacking the clouds, in which it sees giant’s and monsters, and yet it moves close to the ground tripping up on all the underbrush, broken branches, and sharp rocks, which lacerate it miserably.85 (On Humor 89).

Even with the basic example, Krapp’s perception is not shaped by memory, because the memories and musings that he listens to are displaced. They exist literally outside of his body, on spools of tape or in notebooks recording the box and spool numbers and the corresponding topics; Krapp’s consciousness and memory literally surround him in the room, and yet there seems to be little order. Even if he has careful notes to point him to his selections, there is little rhyme or reason—he accesses these memories seemingly at random, with little apparent cause or stimulation from the world around him. Krapp’s memories do not open the possibility for

85 Ma Don Quijote? Coraggio a tutta prova, animo nobilissimo, fiamma di fede; ma quel coraggio non gli frutta che volgari bastonate; quella nobiltà d’animo è una follia; quella fiamma di fede è un misero stoppaccio ch’egli si ostina a tenere acceso, povero pallone mal fatto e rappizzato, che non riesce a pigliar vento, che sogna di lanciarsi a combattere con le nuvole, nelle quali vede giganti e mostri, e va intanto terra terra, incespicando in tutti gli sterpi e gli stecchi e gli spuntioni, che ne fanno strazio, miseramente (Pirandello L’umorismo 112).
specific, responsive actions, and his perceptions do not inform or augment his memories (at least not in any discernible way).

Ultimately, what Beckett presents to us is a figure very much like Pirandello’s Six Characters. Bergson asserts that memory and perception are constantly redefining one another, and yet, that relationship here is undermined. The characters of both plays, whether they stand for the idea of the character itself, or represent some intangible quality of the human condition, are ostensibly out of time. They reject the conventional understanding of time’s flow and do not allow perception and memory their typical functions in the construction of identity. The Six Characters see the actors reinvent their experience into something fixed and historicized. Krapp shrugs away his memories, themselves fixed and made other, the words of which no longer carry the meanings and intentions with which they are recorded (for example, Krapp’s inability to remember the meaning of the word “viduity.”). As Krapp refers to the old fool to whom he is listening the cycle of consciousness, self-consciousness and willful assertion resolve into an identity which renounces a sense of continuity, instead electing to divorce the present man from his past iterations.

We see in Krapp’s Last Tape an extension of anti-theatre anticipated by Waiting For Godot. Much in the same way, Pirandello’s Henry IV extends to ostensibly human entities the problems and questions first posed by the titular Six Characters concerning the nature of reality, and more acutely, the limits at which the body, as the conduit of perception and memory, works in the construction of identity. These plays are not perfect analogues for one another, and it would be wrong to argue otherwise. However, it is clear that, when it comes to the treatment of time, there is much that Beckett owes to Pirandello.
2  Pirandello’s Dramaturgy of Time: A Playwright in Search of His Theatre

With a nomination from Gugliemo Marconi, Pirandello won the Nobel Prize “for his bold and ingenious revival of dramatic and scenic art,” in 1934 (Nobel Media "Nobel Prize" n. pag.). Working, within the largely familiar structures of *verismo* and in reference to the mechanics by which Italian theatre was produced (e.g. the allusion to the star system in *Six Characters*), Pirandello was able to take the familiar methods and tools of the popular theatre and made them strange, like his contemporaries in the Prague School and the Russian Formalists, whose work, as Shklovsky, by way of Victor Erlich, noted, spoke to a desire to “[restructure] the ordinary perception of reality” (in Erlich 629). Pirandello’s plays take on the questions of identity, reality, and being, among others, and interrogating them subtly, just enough to highlight how fragile our world is, built upon individual perception and unspoken and inaccurate assumptions about mutual experience, memory, and history. Pirandello, in highlighting how flimsy the world we create for ourselves and inhabit actually is, turns that world, and ourselves, inside out. It is the inner life that makes the outer world possible in Pirandello, and while this duality is hardly something new, Pirandello removes the assumption of meaning and intelligibility from the equation.

Given the heady content of Pirandello’s drama, and the sensation which they anecdotally elicited in the audience, it’s tempting to say, almost spontaneously, that Pirandello was an explosive force on the European theatre scene. He found his first major success in *Six Characters*. It incited a riot following its 1921 premiere at the Teatro Valle in Rome. It would be produced to great effect by Georges Pitoëff (1923) and Max Reinhardt (1924) in France and Germany, respectively, elevating Pirandello to an internationally famous playwright. His works
would be translated and exported, and on an American tour, there are a number of photos of Pirandello and Albert Einstein spending time together. Suffice to say, Pirandello was a force to be reckoned with, whose influence would reverberate throughout 20th-century theatre. In any case, the popular narrative of Pirandello is that he and his work serves as a turning point, the moment in which old gives way to new, transforming the way theatre is made and understood.

Too bad it’s not exactly true. It’s not exactly false, but as Pirandello would have you understand, the truth is complicated—if it exists at all. Given the circumstances of his birth amidst significant ideological and social change in Italy, Pirandello was no stranger to tumult and violent transition, both politically and personally (one might look at the metaphorical echoes of *Il Risorgimento* in *Lumíe di Sicilia* or the recurring theme of madness that may be inspired by the apparent mental breakdown of his long-suffering wife, Antonietta). But, the reality of Pirandello’s emergence as an artist is that he came to the theatre reluctantly, likely destroying any early plays of the 1890s, writing and publishing his disdain for the popular theatre and its shortcomings as early as 1899, and dramatizing those misgivings as late as 1921 in *Six Characters*. But, Pirandello’s suspicion of the theatre could not sustain itself and with time, Pirandello was able to see the theatre in its own right, with its own mechanics and ways of doing things.

The 1920s were an undeniably fruitful period for Pirandello, pointing to a significant shift in his work theoretically and methodologically. Pirandello may have used his call for spoken action in 1899 as a rallying cry against the theatre, but in 1925 was finally beginning to see how the theatre and the event of a performance could approach the ideal that the concept of spoken action represented. An author’s creation, if it is developed enough and given over to the authenticity that spoken action entails, can, in Pirandello’s construction break free from its
author, and can be imagined in stories and situations that were not originally dreamt of by its creator.

And four years after their first public appearance, in 1925, six of those creations walked through the auditorium, from the outside of the theatre, and onto the stage! In its brevity, the new entrance of the Six Characters is not only a marked shift in Pirandello’s theoretical vision of the theatre, but a development in his practical understanding of how bodies moving through space, and how lighting, costume, and staging can give weight and meaning in the way a purely literary art cannot. It is a sentiment that would reach its fullest expression in Pirandello’s 1934 preface to d’Amico’s *Storia del Teatro Italiano*, with the declaration that “Theatre is not Archaeology” ("Introduzione" 24) and that while the text can be read in its entirety at home, the theatre has the responsibility of making sure that text, if it is to be art, can be renewed and reimagined by the work of theatre artists. In short, Pirandello was, like his famous sextet, for the last decade and for over a half of his life, in search of his theatre.

But this search is not only read in the considerable development of his aesthetic and technical proficiency. Pirandello’s dramaturgy of time augments and enriches his overall development as a playwright, denoting time as a textual theme, as the basis of dramatic narrative, and—in the guise of memory and anticipation—as the ontological foundation of the concept of dramatic character. The Six Characters’ revised entrance signals the importance of the concept of time to Pirandellian dramaturgy. In his revisions, Pirandello imagines the Characters as more clearly defined—not phantasms—and whose identities and motivations are made apparent through the use of masks, writing that,

The masks will help to convey that these figures are the products of art, their faces immutably fixed so that each one expresses its basic motivation: THE FATHER’S face registering Remorse; THE STEPDAUGHTER, Revenge; THE SON, Contempt
and THE MOTHER, Sorrow. THE MOTHER will have fixed wax tears in the dark hollows of her eyes and down her cheeks, like those seen on ecclesiastical images of the Mater Dolorosa  

86 (Pirandello, in Lorch 82).

In this way the Characters possess a kind of ontological purity, fixed not only in their essential characteristics and motivations but also in the moments which define who they are and how they relate to the story and their fellow Characters, outside of the constant flux of human experience. In this way, this new entrance emphasizes the “created reality” that the Characters represent, and by extension, the degree to which all reality is a fabrication, and that while we may share the same space, that while we may talk about and to each other and while we may believe that we manage to arrive at a mutual understanding of the space and experiences we share, that fact is that the world as we understand it extends no farther than our own perceptions and assumptions, is constantly bumping up against, the worlds of other people and their personal histories.

Even in the earlier version of Six Characters, which lacks the visual cues that set the Characters apart from their human counterpart, time and identity in Pirandello (demonstrably indebted to Henri Bergson) become bound up in one another. As the theatre company and the Characters repeatedly try and fail to stage something that satisfies all parties, the Father and Manager debate the nature and reality and change, at which time the Father, because of their status as unchanging, insists that he and his companions are much more real and true than the

86 In both Catholic theology and art criticism, Mater Dolorosa refers to the figure of Our Lady of Sorrows, an iteration of the Virgin Mary mourning the death of her son on the cross. In the context of Pirandello, this serves as a useful parallel in the Mother’s relationship to the Son, who desires to run away, and to the speechless Little Boy, who dies by his own hand.

87 I Personaggi non dovranno infatti apparire come fantasmi, ma come realtà create, costruzioni della fantasia immutabili: e dunque più reali e consistenti della volubile naturalità degli Attori. Le maschere aiuteranno a dare l’impressione della figura costruita per arte e fissata ciascuna immutabilmente nell’espressione del proprio sentimento fondamentale, che è il rimorso per IL PADRE, la vendetta per LA FIGLIASTRA, lo sdegno per IL FIGLIO, il dolore per LA MADRE con fisse lagrime di cera nel livido delle occhiaie e lungo le gote, come si vedono nelle immagini scolpite e dipinte della Mater dolorosa nelle chiese (Sei personaggi 27).
actors who will play them (Pirandello *Six Characters* 266). With this exchange, about two-thirds through the play, we’ve finally gotten to the heart of the problem that Pirandello is confronting in his tentative journey towards a theatre artist in the early 1920s. Adriano Tilgher would establish this fundamental crisis as the life/form dichotomy that generations of Pirandello scholarship would draw upon. It is a useful shorthand but doesn’t really get to the inherent violence at work in this moment of the play. Pirandello philosophized about the destructive power of rendering a creative impulse into the dramatic form in 1899 and 1908. But in 1921 he begins to articulate the difficulty of finding the means of sharing that impulse to its fullest extent. The Characters see death in the work of the Actors, a fixity of a different sort that takes their story, and the depth and breadth of the unique ontological status and a language of bodies, sets, props, and costumes that stand in for people places, things, and attire. However, time, serving as both signifier and signified, is harder to interpret and account for. In the case of the Six Characters, it is the absence of time (and its corresponding stream of consciousness that structures personal history, narrative, and memory) that is, in the end, what precludes the staging of the Characters’ story. The duration occupied by a work of art, in this case, a play, may represent the passage of days or years over a matter of hours, or, it may not even correspond to a linear, measurable period of time at all. But the absence of time itself resists representation and understanding.

The Characters’ conundrum in a way also mirrors the process of becoming in human reality—though we often don’t pay as much attention to it. The human proxies that the Actors and their Director represent know that their reality changes constantly, but by standing in for us, suggest the lack of reflection on the profundity of this constant flux. We know we change, but we often don’t realize the magnitude of that change until we look back on our lives and our decisions. The Characters offer a stark contrast, juxtaposing this ceaseless change with a lack
thereof, something so foreign that Pirandello creates a world in which our own inability to grasp the absence of change becomes a central point of conflict.

Pirandello extends this discovery and its relationship to performance, reality, and identity in his next major success, *Henry IV*. Pirandello, rather than offering descriptions of how experience, memory, and time *work*, demonstrates how these things become inscribed, irrevocably on the body. The boundaries and borders that are confronted in *Henry IV* are harder to delineate than that of its predecessor. In *Six Characters*, we had the fourth wall—a physical border between real, lived experience and narrative that is consciously fabricated—to define and demarcate two very different ways of being. The stage border may not have helped the epistemological and ontological impasse that the play dramatized, but it provides a visual reference for the relationships between these two different ways of being.

*Henry IV* offers something, that on the surface seems similar. The play opens in an 11th-century throne room. A couple of guards in the appropriate dress lounge about the space, as there is no one to attend to at the moment. According to the stage directions, a pair of large, modern-looking oil paintings catch the eye, out of place in relation to the medieval setting. Several people enter, also in medieval garb, and we learn that all of this is an elaborate set, built to give weight to the protagonist’s delusion that he is the Holy Roman Emperor Henry IV. Otherwise unnamed, Henry turns out to be a modern 20th-century man suffering from a madness that is the result of a decades-old head injury sustained during a costume parade in which he was dressed as his namesake. A group of men and women, several of whom were present at the event twenty years before arrive at the villa, intent on curing Henry. They change from their modern clothing into costumes held on-site for visitors. Thus, the complicated interchange
between old and new, as each intermingles and invades the other, is established almost from the beginning of the drama.

But, the novelty of the play does not come solely from this juxtaposition between medieval and modern. Pirandello uses Henry’s peculiar mental state to highlight just how large a role the passage of time plays in the construction of identity, and how much of how we see ourselves is not unlike the play acting at the heart of *Six Characters*. The construction of identity is a kind of temporal extension, and Pirandello, by way of Henry, demonstrates the possible consequences of when such an extension is interrupted. As *Henry IV* progresses, it is revealed that Henry had returned to sanity some time ago, and seeing how he had aged and how the world had moved on without him, chose instead to persist in feigned madness. In one memorable passage, Henry describes the sensation of realizing how much time he had lost to his illness. When he points to his grey hair, Belcredi says that his turned grey with time as well, but Henry cries that his turned grey all at once, and that in effect he had gone grey inside as well, and had arrived “hungry as a wolf at a banquet which had already been cleared away” (Pirandello *Henry IV* 203) It’s a remarkable moment, because not only does Pirandello highlight how time inscribes itself on the body—hardly a remarkable assertion—but it expounds upon the anxieties first identified in *Six Characters*. Henry is in one moment of his life, taken out of time and unaware of its passage. He lives and repeats moments out of the historical record pertaining to Henry IV, Matilda of Tuscany, and the palace at Canossa. In that madness, time doesn’t matter and he is in the eternal moment of excommunication and of penance. In madness, Henry gets as close to the unrealized character dramatized in *Six Characters* as is conceivably possible. Upon his re-entry into the stream of consciousness that marks him as a 20th-century man, Henry becomes suddenly aware of what is past, and how this immense loss of time, and in a way life,
necessarily resists recapture. He is put into the story of a man who was ill and is now better. But the narrative structure that story necessitates is utterly reductive. Like the Six Characters, who see irredeemable damage and death in the work of the actors, Pirandello’s Henry is suddenly conscious of his own mortality, and in the pursuit of control over his own life, tries unsuccessfully to push the idea of death away, attempting to manipulate time. The play lends itself to a Heideggerian analysis in how it treats being, authenticity. Henry plays a role, but so do the others in the play—so do all of us, in a way, in how we see and present ourselves to the world, and in how we hope to be perceived. But Pirandello has imbued his Henry with a consciousness of his role.

Pirandello’s theatre, therefore, does not only interrogate its own creation or the creation of drama itself but the creative act that is life. The boundaries that Pirandello tests in the play are not as clear as those identified and implemented as Six Characters. Instead, Pirandello’s Henry, in his attempt to maintain the integrity of his “character” infiltrates human world so that he can reveal the artifice that makes life intelligible. Henry IV shows how life and theatre become indistinguishable, using time (and the consequences of the interruption or disruption of its flow) as the mechanism by which identity is built.

In the late 1920s, Pirandello would turn again to the mechanics of the theatre making with Tonight We Improvise. Among the three theatre plays that Pirandello completed (a fourth, The Mountain Giants, remained unfinished at the time of Pirandello’s death in 1936), Tonight We Improvise represents the most significant shift in Pirandello’s belief in the theatre’s efficacy. Whereas Six Characters reinforces the 1899 assertion that “plays don’t create people, people create a play,” Tonight We Improvise speaks to the collaborative effort that is one of the distinguishing features of the theatre. In the figure of Dr. Hinkfuss, Pirandello gently
antagonizes the figure of the modern director (the concept of which began to emerge in the 19th-century) who, as previously noted, might be an allusion to Max Reinhardt or Edward Gordon Craig and the length they went to realize their singular visions. Hinkfuss, apparently driven out by his company after his meddling has all but ruined the improvised production, is revealed to have manipulated the lighting effect at the drama’s climax, heightening the emotional impact, suggesting that work of the theatre can never be the product of one person’s vision.

Even if Today We Improvise closes with a call from the actors for an actual dramatic text, what is still clear is that Pirandello has realized that the theatre is not, as he previously assumed, a poor translation of the literary arts, derivative and inferior. Instead, this late drama embraces the theatre’s peculiarities and anticipates Pirandello’s 1936 assertion that the art of the theatre is, in fact, “an act of life,” each moment of which is created in the performance together with the public (Pirandello “Introduzione” 25-26). This new regard for theatre necessitates a more sophisticated treatment of time in Today We Improvise. Unlike the plays already considered, time is not explicitly the dramaturgical center of the dramas the way it is in Six Characters or Henry IV. Instead, Pirandello explores the fabrication of a play via the intertwined components of space and time, and how they both make action possible or intelligible and contain it. For one, Today We Improvise emerged parallel to the quantum theory and uncertainty in the study of modern physics. Pirandello had engaged in a career-long investigation of what makes a play, but in the theatre plays of the 1920s—especially Today We Improvise—the object of study and the medium by which it is studied become indistinguishable. It is a play that demonstrates just how important time actually is, and how little it is reflected upon. Not only is the role of a play’s duration and what sorts of narrative elongations and compressions it can represent complicated, but the actual role time plays in the creation of a play.
Hinkfuss has put his company of actors through the challenges of creating an improvised performance according to a scenario drawn from Pirandello’s literary works, (it is also a clever allusion to how Pirandello inserted himself into the early moments of *Six Characters* in the play the company was originally rehearsing when the Characters entered). Almost all of the initial challenges and troubles that plague the production come down to the fact that the actors simply haven’t had time to do their work— injuries, false starts, misplaced entrances are all crude and overt nods to the fact that making theatre takes time. Even becoming a skilled improviser takes time.

But the technical mishaps that plague the play give way as it progresses, in some ways incorporating and augmenting the dramaturgy of time that Pirandello began to develop in nearly a decade earlier. The Bergsonian fascinations with corporeality manifests, as does Husserl’s structuring of time consciousness (specifically through the constant interruptions, which give us the sense that something whole could exist and extend over time), to Heidegger’s analysis of being and the status of the work of art.

In fact, *Tonight We Improvise* explores in practice what *Six Characters* could only interrogate in theory. The central point of conflict in *Six Characters* coalesces around the barriers to, difficulties around, or consequences of embodying or otherwise realizing an artistic impulse, and bearing witness to that realization as it moves through space and extends itself across time. *Tonight We Improvise* gives a practical dimension to the challenges *Six Characters* poses. The act of creation in Pirandellian dramaturgy is necessarily violent. The Six Characters see their diminishment and death, in the work of the actors. *Tonight We Improvise* and its actors (themselves characters within the world of the play) have violence inflicted upon them as well, as the drama/performance proceeds from the initial, artless, and superficial attempts at creating
art to a moment that stands an expression of truly artist freedom. It is true that “These characters no more live "according to their own impulsion" at the end than they do at the beginning and it is impossible to ignore that real actors act out the words of a playwright under the supervision of a real director all the way through” (Schmitt 187). But, such a realization is no more revolutionary than the awareness that the Six Characters who intrude upon the rehearsal are themselves actors. Pirandello wrote plays about the pursuit of creativity and artistic freedom, and actors played them, even as Pirandello, through words and actions, criticizes the limitations of the form. Still, the climax of the play—at once both the death of Mommina in the inner play and the traumatic physical episode that the Leading Lady experiences as she plays her role—is divorced from the gimmicks and self-consciousness that prevented the company from making “art.” Instead, it represents that potential (and danger) that the theatre offers. In short, in his early days, Pirandello’s Six Characters accused the company of actors of producing work that was more real but less true than the ontological and epistemological purity that the Characters offer. But, at the end of the 1920s, after Pirandello had the opportunity to work in the theatre, he found that the theatre, with its own reality and ways of doing things, can represent and revive the truth. It might not be the case for Tonight We Improvise—the knowledge that we are watching actors performing a rehearsed work is never far away (in spite of what the script or performance would have us believe)—but Pirandello no longer withholds the status of art from the theatre, and as such, it offers the potential for intellectual and emotional engagement.

Among the three completed theatre plays, Tonight We Improvise is the most persuasive evidence of Pirandello’s changing regard for the theatre. Regardless of the lack of overt political messages in his work, Pirandello capitalizes on some elements of the futurist movement—its attempt at sensational, riotous works of art, its exploration of time and simultaneity, Hinkfuss’
desire to create something new and never before witnessed—without directly partaking in its fascist underpinnings. *Tonight We Improvise* turns its attention away from dramatic writing that Pirandello privileged at the beginning of his career in the theatre, and instead focuses on the composition of the theatrical event, where space, time, language, and movement coalesce into something very different from the literary endeavors of his youth. The dramatic text and its performance are related, of course, but they both are and are not individual works of art. The former may have a clear and easy authorial attribution, but the ownership of the latter is harder to discern. Moreover, a play can change from production to production, as new ideas and methods are applied to extant texts, or even from performance to performance. There is nothing to hold onto. At the end of the show or a production run, the items that represent the textural world of the stage—those items that give the represented world it’s physical dimensions and tactile qualities, are no longer charged with the meaning they held over the course of the production.

Yet, even though time is an element of narrative art, and especially of drama, *Tonight We Improvise* demonstrates how it resists the associations of the other properties of the theatre. Nothing can stand in for time—we can appear to compress or dilate it with narrative devices or staging techniques, but in the modern theatre, the duration of a play does not necessarily correspond to the length or the pace of action represented. For example, Castelvetro said that a play should only last as long as the action depicted (Pfister 249). Still, in Pirandello’s theatre plays, you could argue that this tends to happen since the plays are very rarely about their inner dramas and much more about the particular challenges of making theatre, so in a way it adheres to the neo-classical prescription.

But taken as a whole, and in considering the evolution of Pirandello’s dramaturgy, it becomes clear that time isn’t just another element of storytelling and drama that we must account
for. In the early days of *Six Characters*, the very concepts of time and duration (the latter which represent the time over which an artistic impulse was expressed) meant the death of art itself, as in *Six Characters*. Later, time functions as the ontological ground of character, and more broadly, identity, as in *Henry IV*. Finally, in dispensing with direct references to time and its passage/lack thereof, Pirandello’s uses the theatre’s own mechanisms to interrogate what makes theatre, theatre (rather than what makes theatre “not literature.”). *Tonight We Improvise* is about time, but time in a very specific way. This last play is about Pirandello’s time writing for and working in the theatre, and is only made possible by his exposure to the theatre, how it works, and what is can accomplish. In short, plays need time—theoretically and practically. And, in the end, so did Pirandello.
Epilogue

One of the primary concerns that Pirandello addressed in his dramas is what it means for a character to live. The three plays that have been discussed approach the topic each in their own particular way. *Six Characters in Search of an Author* theatricalizes the 1899 call for “spoken action,” decrying the efforts of the “philosophical writers” that Pirandello countered; Pirandello demanded people to populate and create his drama, rather than dramas that established conditions that characters must respond to in demonstration of a fact or moral position. *Henry IV* followed up the international success of *Six Characters* with a meditation on not only the question of what it means to live but what it means to live with and among others. The characters that populate the world of *Henry IV* each understand that world through the lenses of individual memory, social status, gender, sanity, and personal and shared history. The play takes the philosophizing of *Six Characters* on the failure of mutual understanding and embodies it in ostensibly human figures, suggesting not only do human beings fail to comprehend beings who emerge from and exist in the world of art, but they also can’t seem to comprehend one another. Doubling this challenge is the central figure of Henry, who manages to dually occupy both the “real” human world and that of the fictionalized Holy Roman Emperor, Henry IV. *Tonight We Improvise* returns to the topic of theatre making, but rather than locating the conflict in the juxtaposition between *homo sapiens* and *homo fictus*, instead finds the drama in the continuum that exists between the two, as the former try to evoke that latter in the pursuit of an improvised performance.

In all three, there is a distinct fascination with time and space. This thesis has placed its emphasis on the former. *Six Characters* highlights the timeless quality of the Characters and the circumstances from which they originate. *Henry IV* locates the ontological and epistemological
ground for identity in memory and shared history. *Tonight We Improvise* reflects upon not only the time it takes to make theatre, but demonstrates Pirandello’s aesthetic evolution as a result of working in the theatre. These dramas (and more broadly, Pirandello’s considerable body of work) denote time not only as a fundamental component of narrative, but as foundation of dramatic character and as a central theme within his work. The fascination with time that is borne out in Pirandello’s dramas is not derivative to his methods and resulting work, but firmly entrenched in the creative vision that mark Pirandello as one of the most significant and fascinating voices to emerge from modern Italian theatre. That time as an essential component of his dramaturgy has been largely overlooked in the scholarship surrounding Pirandello speaks to the complexity of the topic, which as Augustine noted, is easily understood until one is asked to articulate what time actually is (230-231).

Of Pirandello’s most piercing insights into the human condition is that life and theatre are not as far apart as they would appear. The act of creation engages everyone, not only artists, as people are always forming their identities by way of personal history and interpersonal connections. Pirandello would also suggest that everyone plays a role—some version of him- or herself—depending on the context of certain interactions and how one sees themselves or wants to be seen by others. In light of both of these positions, it is clear that time is not subordinate to Pirandello’s project, but at its very heart. The questions that Pirandello’s raises about art and life necessitate a meditation on time itself. The development of an identity is a kind of temporal extensions, the significance of which can only be grasped through reflection. The world which we try to build with others necessitates co-presence and simultaneity, even if in Pirandello’s worldview, we fail to construct that world because our efforts are based upon the illusion of mutual understanding. When Pirandello expresses his worldview in terms of art and theatre, it is
not because art is fundamentally different from or better than human life, but rather these and
other creative enterprises are uniquely human endeavors, tied explicitly to the finitude and frailty
of the body and its ability to perceive. The Six Characters resist interpretation because the
Actors who would play them, by virtue of their bodies and relationship to time, cannot share in
their unique ontological and epistemological positions. In fact, the more Pirandello’s ostensibly
human figures retreat from a conventional (that is, human) understanding of time’s passage and
attempt to grasp the timelessness that mark the Six Characters as *homo fictus* (e.g., Henry in
*Henry IV*, or the Leading Lady as Mommina in *Tonight We Improvise*), the more volatile and
unstable those figures and their relationships to others become. In short, in juxtaposing life and
form/art, or more concretely, in making character and actor confront one another, Pirandello
engages with the fundamental tension between time and timelessness (Brustein 282).

Thus, the concept of time is the fulcrum upon which much of Pirandello’s work hinges.
Pirandello used his theatre plays to interrogate what it means to realize an artistic impulse and
put it in time. Other works, particularly *Henry IV*, consider the roles of memory and the body in
the creation of identity. It is perhaps this treatment of time that can, to borrow ever so slightly
from his Dr. Hinkfuss, lift Pirandello out of the rigid adherence to historical modernism that
typically contextualizes this playwright. Pirandello believed that the work of art was capable of
having many lives, not just one, and that the art of the theatre was not the product of one
person’s efforts, but a work created across time together with the public. Even in Pirandello’s
youthful cynicism about the theatre, there is an undeniable urgency, as his characters fight
against time and death to be understood in *Six Characters*, or desire to grasp what has been lost
in *Henry IV*, or confront the temporal and spatial limitations of the theatrical arts. Pirandello is
not a historical curiosity. Instead, he used his art to investigate what humans do best—create.
And the urgency and humanness of this investigation can be renewed by attending to Pirandello’s dramaturgy of time, since time is really the only thing he and his characters had to work with in the end.
Works Cited


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